

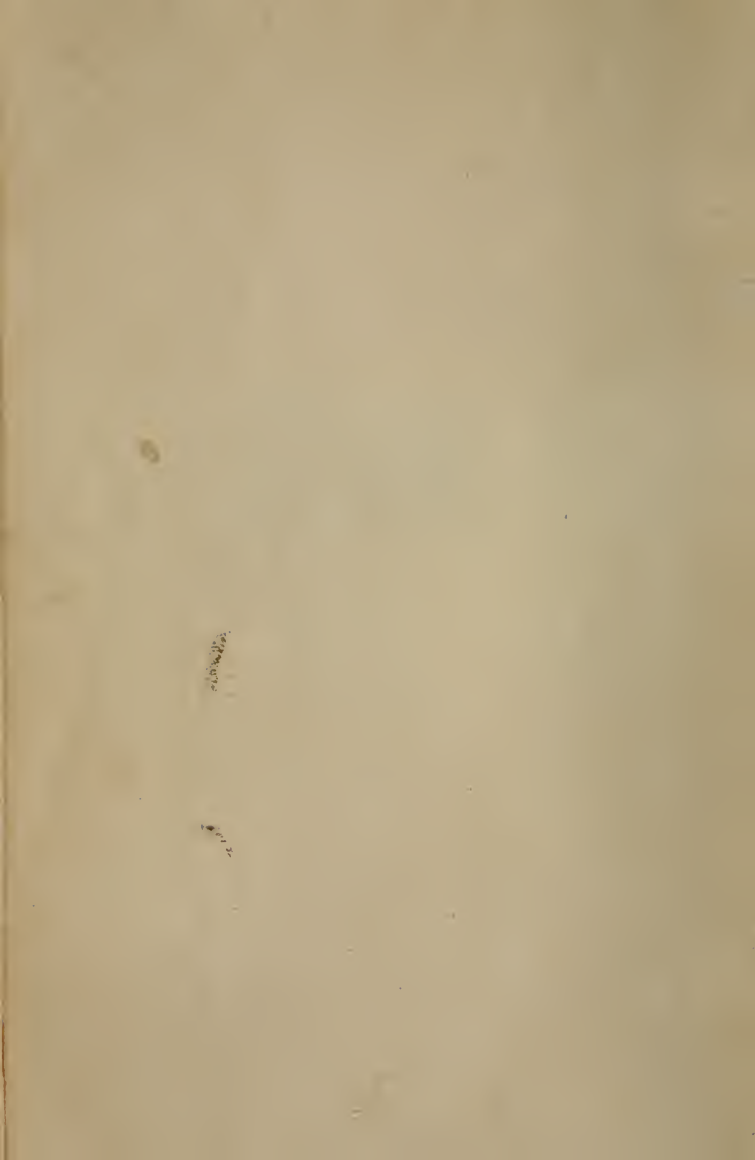
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# JANET'S CHOICE.

BY

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“MAGGIE’S SECRET.”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.


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# JANET'S CHOICE.

## CHAPTER I.

"The sights and sounds of country  
Came in the warm soft time,  
Sung by the honeyed breezes,  
Borne on the wings of June."

ADELAIDE PROCTOR.

**A**N old fashioned garden, with trim walls and quaintly cut yew-trees, through which the wind sighed, as it were impatiently, as it hurried on to breathe the fragrance of the flowers in the well-stocked borders. Sweet-peas, mignonette, and lavender scented the air, and almost concealed the aroma of a cigar which was between

Gen. Rm. Ray 21 Nov. 52 Charlotte 34.

the lips of a young man who paced up and down between the sentinel yews.

He was tall and well proportioned, but there was an air of languor about him which did not speak well for his health; indeed Sir Archibald Morton had only just recovered from a severe illness, and had come to Lashiels, his lowland property, for a little change of air after a London season, before the time came for the Highlands, and the serious work of pursuing, at the same time, pleasure and grouse over the moor-lands at Glen-Auchmuty.

The sunshine of an evening in June was turning the whole country into gold. The rising grounds upon which stood groups of forest trees, the valley, the tumbling busy river, the far away hills, were all gilded and chequered with ever-changing lights and shadows.

“What a delicious evening,” the young man was saying to himself, “and what a rum ghostly old place! I wonder if my ancestors take the air here at the witching hour of midnight, got up in correct style, in flowing white garments, or in rustling silk dresses. Let me see, a figure of a female should glide noiselessly between me and the wall, beckoning with an uplifted finger, and expecting me to follow, and then it would as suddenly disappear, leaving me in a state of mind, which, when authors feel quite unable to define it, they leave it to their readers to picture, and merely say ‘it is better imagined than described.’

“Now that I have come down to do a little ruralising for the benefit of my health, and business for the benefit of my pocket, would be the



very time for an adventure of this kind to take place."

He took another turn along the path, across which the shadows of the yews were getting deeper and longer; then, pausing at a flight of steps which led to a kind of rocky wilderness below, he listened to the blended sounds from the village, which was hidden by thick clusters of trees from intruding on the view of the "big house," but which was near enough to take away the sense of loneliness which the somewhat gloomy appearance of Lashiels might otherwise have caused. The cigar was smoked out, the darkness increased, and the sounds grew more hushed, and at last he turned to re-enter the house.

As he did so, a dark shadow flitted by and startled him somewhat.

It was that of a female figure with a hood, or shawl, drawn over the head. He paused for a moment in surprise.

Though by no means a nervous or superstitious man, there was something strangely weird and ghostlike in the whole scene; and that the very figure he had, as it were, invoked in his careless musings half an hour before, with the uplifted beckoning finger, should have come and shown itself, was to say the least of it a curious coincidence. For an instant he paused, and then his calm sense and judgment came to his aid, and he determined to follow the figure, as he now began to suspect that a trick was being played on him by some member of the household.

Springing lightly over the low rail-

ings which divided the garden from the meadow, he now stood forth in the clear moonlight, and so came in sight of two people, a young man in velveteen garments, and a graceful girl, standing in earnest conversation at a corner of the field. The pale moonlight flickered on her wavy brown hair, and the shawl that had been thrown over her head when she had cast her ghost-like shadow on the wall, now falling back, disclosed a perfectly moulded head and throat, with a sad pleading face uplifted.

“A pretty village romance,” said Sir Archibald to himself, “a great deal more to my mind than a ghost story would have been.”

Not wishing to spoil sport, and knowing enough of the world to believe in the truth of the old adage, “Two are

enough, and three are too many," he returned quietly and entered a low door-way, whose stone porch was thickly canopied with honeysuckle and white jasmine.

"Come in, Archie; good gracious, what in the world do you mean by standing about in the cold after such an illness as you have had?" said a voice from within the pretty oriel-windowed room.

"My lady mother! I hope you have not been waiting for me before you began your tea," said Sir Archibald, taking his mother's little face between his strong hands, and looking down on her small, slight figure with a mixture of reverence and protection in his gaze.

Lady Morton had a fresh, bright complexion, and a thoroughly sweet wo-

manly expression. The soft white ruching of her widow's cap was very becoming to her, and gave an ideality to what might once have been a pretty but common-place face. There were a few lines on her smooth, white forehead, which, together with a look as of past tears in her eyes, told one at once that she had passed through troubles in her day, and had come out of the fire refined and purified.

“What have you been doing all this time?” said a bright cheery voice, and Archie turned with a smile to the tea-table, the presiding genius of which, Petronel Morton, was the beauty and tyrant of the family.

*Pet*, as she was commonly called, from the obvious reason that the abbreviated name was the most suitable one to the acknowledged pet of the family.



Her beauty spoke for itself; it was not only that her features were good, her complexion superb, and her figure splendid—true she possessed all these and countless other charms; but her peculiar loveliness lay in her expression, which was varied as a landscape varies under passing clouds crossing April sunshine. And then her smile—I might as soon attempt to paint the rainbow as to describe it! It flashed out upon you like a sudden Summer, lighting up the whole face and reflecting itself involuntarily on the countenances around her. There were dimples too, in which a deal of fascination lay hidden, waiting covertly to wake up and to take the beholder by storm.

A truly dangerous young woman was Petronel; and I think she knew it, and, being confident in her own powers,

could afford to be friendly and gracious to beings of an inferior order, in which category she regarded those young ladies less gifted than herself.

“I have been having a cigar, and under the soothing influence of the smoke and the still evening air, I have come to the conclusion that this is not half such a bad place after all,” said Archie, as he took his seat at the tea-table.

“I only hope you and Pet won't find it dull here,” said Lady Morton, as she glanced with maternal pride at her handsome son and daughter. “I know Grace will like it, it is such a rest after London; is it not, my dear?”

“I intend to enjoy myself immensely,” said Grace, “and I hope to have some fine weather for sketching.”

Grace Morton was a cripple, and sadly deformed, but, unlike many whose minds seem to have an answering twist to that of their bodies, she was the gentle guiding star of the home circle.

Naturally timid, and unable, on account of her infirmities, to enter into the active pleasures of her brother and sister, her mind had taken a turn of its own, and in the quiet pursuits suited to her bodily weakness, she found for herself a happy and ever fresh life.

She had rare talents; but living as she did in complete seclusion, none of the outside world guessed at them, and when her pale face was occasionally seen in the carriage, beside her mother's, as Lady Morton drove in the park, she was talked of as "that poor afflicted daughter of Lady Mor-

ton's, a sad trouble in the family, I fear !''

Those bright butterflies of fashion, which flitted gaily from flower to flower, sipping the honey only to complain of the sameness of its taste, could not have guessed of the rich stores of sweets which that little unnoticed brown moth contrived to gather in her unobtrusive flight.

She had pure instincts and a sensitive imagination, and these, together with her keen powers of insight and sense of enjoyment in all glad outward influences, prevented her from ever feeling dull or out of sorts.

Petronel, with her wonderful smile, brought flashes of sunshine to cheer her home ; but Grace's loving gentleness kept warm a soft nest of happiness, round which Lady Morton or Archie,

in any trouble or chill, would gather and be instantly soothed.

“Do you know, I saw a ghost to-night;” said Archie, as he stirred his tea.

“A ghost!” said Pet, “I should say you might see them by dozens in this dreary old moated grange.”

“Dreary, do you call it?” said Archie; “I call it the jolliest place out, and I am sure we shall find plenty of amusement in the neighbourhood while we stay here. I am quite surprised that my father did not care enough for this place to live here, instead of letting it as he did for so many years. However, if Pet is dull, mother, we must ask some fellows here for her to kill with a glance or, if she is tired of that wholesale slaughter, she can go and pay visits to some of her numerous dear



friends in their country houses, and flirt with a curate or two, just to keep her hand in, you know, for fear she should be out of practice by the shooting season."

Petronel tossed her head impatiently, and the colour mounted to her forehead at her brother's words.

"I am so glad you like this dear old place, Archie," said Grace, interposing, as usual, to prevent an explosion from Petronel. "I remember so well when you were at Eton, I stayed here for six months with Aunt Georgie, when Uncle Robert was living here. It was so delightful! There is no end of good places for fishing in the river, and, as far as I know, the country neighbours are very nice people. But you have never told us about the ghost! and now it is so near bed-time, that I

ought not to have reminded you of it, or we shall all of us retire quaking to our apartments."

"My ghost was not a very alarming one," said Archie. "It turned out to be substantial enough in the full light of the moon, though shadowy enough under the wall. It proved to be nothing more or less than a village girl with a shawl thrown over her head, holding an interesting conversation with her 'young man.'"

"I hope you did not interrupt!" said Petronel, laughing.

"No, my dear, I looked the other way, in the same manner as I did when I saw you dancing so often with Lord Veryphast, at Lady Toddleton's ball, do you remember?"

Petronel rushed at her brother laughingly, and tried to stop his mouth

with her fair white hand, and Lady Morton announced that, as the children were becoming troublesome, she should move an adjournment to bed.

## CHAPTER II.

“God gives us love. Something to love  
 He lends us ; but when love is grown  
 To ripeness, that on which it throve  
 Falls off, and love is left alone.”

TENNYSON.

ANDREW MACPHERSON, the tenant  
 of the home-farm at Lashiels, was  
 a hard man.

True, he had always passed muster,  
 in the little world to which he be-  
 longed, as a respectable, hardworking  
 farmer, who kept himself and his family  
 above the mean subterfuges to which so  
 many have recourse in order to keep

their heads above water. But, in spite of this, he was known as a hard man, extracting his full money's worth out of every thing that was worth money, and never making allowances for ill-health, troubles, or any other infirmity which interfered with the labour of any whom he employed.

He was a tall powerful man, his shoulders a good deal bent, and his large head, with its mat of thick, bushy red hair, drooping somewhat forward on his breast.

Money was his one hope and ambition in life, it was his faith and his religion, his hard task-master and the idol to which he bowed down.

He was, it is needless to say, more feared than loved in his house; indeed, the sound of his footstep in the passage, or of his harsh voice raised (as it so



often was) in scolding accents, was instantly the signal for a sudden pause in the conversation which was going on amongst the woman-kind.

His whole nature was kept down and stultified by the grinding tyranny of gold, and even his natural senses seemed to have been dimmed by its corrosive properties; and he could not look around and see that his lot had fallen in a fair ground, but, ever as he gazed, his eyes fixed themselves on some object for which money might be obtained, or some spot of barren land by the neglect of which money had been wasted.

His wife feared him even more than his daughters did. She was a poor weak body, but with a strong loving heart.

All the joy had been trodden early out of her life by the death of her two bonny boys, her pride and delight.

They had died when quite young of a low fever, which was at that time raging in the village, and she was then left with only one child, Janet, her eldest daughter. Since then, three more little girls had been born, and each time when the father had received the news that another daughter had been sent instead of the son he so longed for, his manner grew sterner and colder, until his poor wife shut up her griefs within her aching heart, and sought no more for the sympathy she was sure never to gain from him.

Susan, Alice, and Emma were merry, pretty girls, in all the glory of perfect health, but Janet was as superior to any of them as is the majestic swan to the quacking brood of ducks that swim round her in the pond.

Janet was about twenty-five years old

at the time this story begins, and the reader has been already introduced to her, though in rather a ghostly guise, as she stood talking to Donald Inverarity, the under-keeper at Lashiels, by the light of the Summer moon.

Donald and Janet had been play-mates long ago, in the happy days when her little brothers had been alive, and when they used to wander about at their own sweet wills among the woods and dales round Lashiels.

The village, with the everlasting hills overshadowing it, with the river running through it, and the cool splashing noise of the water-fall forming a sort of background sound to their merry voices and ringing laughter; all seemed to make up a picture of youth and home which would have satisfied Janet for ever. But Donald was of a more ad-

venturous turn of mind, and even in those child-like days long ago, he had astonished his little companions by the daring flights of his fancy, and his longings for things totally at variance with their quiet life in the glen.

He was a true offspring of the hills, sturdy, self-reliant, and courageous, and many a time would Janet's little face blanch with terror at the trees he would climb, and the rocky cliffs he would scale in search of the wild bird's eggs for her.

So happy they had been together ! Janet often looked back on those days as on a dream of bliss. Then had come the trouble, her brothers' deaths, and her own lonely childhood. When she wandered listlessly about in the old haunts, a sad little girl, with her large grey eyes heavy with tears, it was Donald who would come and cheer her with

his bright hopes and fancies, and the marvellous visions of future delights in which Janet was always to share.

“For you know, Janet, when I am a man and have been all over the world, I will come back and you shall be my little wife,” Donald would say, and Janet would put her little brown hand into his strong one, and dry her eyes and look up at his face and be comforted.

When the first snowdrop put its head above the cold wintry ground, Donald would gather it and carry it carefully to give to Janet; when Spring advanced he would search the banks and hedgerows for the pale primrose for her; he would tell her when and where the birds were building; all about the rook parliament which he had watched, and how many eggs there were in the swallow's nest under the eaves of the stable-roof. They

had grown up to be friends, and as years went by, and Donald became the handsomest lad in the village, and the soft down appeared on his chin, then Janet used to gaze at him with blushing delight, and rejoice when any word of praise of him fell on her ears.

At last when he was nineteen, a terrible change came. The war in the Crimea broke out, and in the stir it made all over the world, a little wave of the great trouble washed over the quiet village of Lashiels.

Donald's love of adventure was still strong within him, and only required a stir to make it blaze forth anew. A recruiting sergeant on his way North to wake the ardour of the young Highlanders, was not likely to let such a promising piece of bone and sinew pass, and accordingly tried his arts on Donald,

who, nothing loth, took the shilling, and became the servant of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, and pledged to fight her battles, and defend her country. It was only when Donald saw the sad look of Janet's eyes, when he told her the news, that he at all realized what the separation from her would cost him.

She was such a child that no serious thoughts of love and marriage had as yet disturbed her serenity, but Donald's protecting care had been so very dear to her, and she had no one whom she could love so well, and altogether poor Janet felt very miserable.

It was in vain for him to talk of glory, of splendid victories, and of promotion sure and speedy. The very words he used to cheer her, only added poignancy to her grief, for they showed her how real that grief was.

So Donald went to the Crimea, and from time to time newspapers would penetrate to the little village, and fill all hearts with awe and wonder at the accounts of battles won and brave deeds done. And Janet would steal away to a quiet corner, when her little sisters were playing happily together, and weave a bright web of dream-land fancies, in which all the golden deeds of heroism were wrought by her own hero; and truly the romances of her simple mind were not more fantastic, more unreal, than those of many older and wiser than she was have been.

Time went on, and Janet was no longer allowed to be idle.

Her father, who was too much occupied with his farming and money-making to notice his children, suddenly awoke



to the fact that Janet was growing into a young woman.

“No more idleness for you, Miss,” he exclaimed, the day this idea first dawned upon him. “Do you think I am to toil and slave in order that my girls may be useless fine ladies? No, indeed, you must all put your shoulders to the wheel and help on the family coach. The dairy-maid has given notice to quit at the term, and you must take her place for the future and not sit with your hands before you, or reading your silly books any longer.”

It was not in Janet's nature to love idleness, indeed her father libelled her when he accused her of want of industry; but she had never before known what it was to be driven to work, and at first the drudgery seemed more than she could bear.

Time, however, softens all things, and by the end of the first year, when her butter was sought after in the market, and her cream was always rich and good, her heart awakened to real interest in her work, and she forgot her miseries in the result of her labours.

A true woman rejoices in the successful performance of a duty, and Janet's interest in her pans of cream and yellow pounds of butter grew and expanded till she felt almost as happy in her own domain as she used to do in the olden days, as she sat beneath the flowering thorn, listening to Donald's fairy-castles in the air. Meanwhile, the war went on, and at last came to an end, and Janet began to ask herself how soon it would be possible for Donald to come home.

Days, weeks, months passed, and no

tidings reached Lashiels of the doings of the village hero, for so he was generally considered among the simple folk.

At last it became known that Donald Inverarity had taken service with a young officer who had purchased his discharge, and had set out for a prolonged course of travel through foreign lands.

So years slipped by, and Janet grew from a pretty, thoughtful child to a beautiful young woman. She had been so long expecting Donald to come home, that when he did return, bronzed and travel-stained, and came up to her suddenly one evening as she stood on the brow of the hill behind the house, she was almost stunned for a moment, and refused to believe the evidence of her own senses.

Twilight was stealing over the land-

scape, the air was still, and the grey, fleecy, clouds were piled up in masses round the mountain tops. The white mists were rising from the valley, might not the figure she saw coming towards her be some weird spirit of the glen or fell, of whom she had read so often in her old books of ballads.

But one look at Donald's honest blue eyes made it all right, and sent doubt, fear, and superstition flying on the wings of the evening breeze. With what joy they met, and how openly and eagerly they walked home together to her father's house she never forgot!

It was so natural, so right that they should be together. Did she not belong to him? Had he not been everything to her ever since they were children?

Proudly and joyfully she opened the kitchen-door and ushered him in.

Her mother was sitting knitting by the fire-light, while her father engrossed the whole light of the one candle he allowed to be burnt at a time, and was sitting at the table making up his weekly accounts in his ledger.

His brow was bent more than usual, and there was a light in those grey eyes of his as they twinkled restlessly beneath the overshadowing pent-houses of his eyebrows, that Janet would not have dared to face had she not been so uncommonly happy and brave.

“Father, Donald is here, dear Donald! he has come back at last after all these years, and I knew him at once, in spite of his beard, the moment I saw him smile.”

For an instant there was an ominous silence in the long low-raftered room. A lull as if the elements were gathering

for a storm, and then it broke. Fast and furious fell the words from the old man's lips as he bid the stranger begone, and never darken his door again.

"The son of a murderer," he said, "should never be seen talking to a daughter of his."

Then as Janet, in bewilderment, only clung the faster to the strong young arm on which she had been leaning, he turned to her and ordered her at once to swear never again to speak to, or even to recognise Donald—never to allow him to come near her—never to breathe his name again!

"No, you must never swear that!" whispered Donald to the frightened girl, and even in that moment of amazement and agony she relapsed naturally into her old obedience to him, and was silent at his bidding.

Long they spoke, those two men, with their strong natures roused, and their words coming rapidly to their lips.

“A murderer’s son shall never darken my doors!” said Andrew Macpherson again, as he grasped the back of his chair with both hands, and glared fiercely at the stranger.

“I am not a murderer’s son! and who dares to say that I am? Who dares to say a word against my father?” retorted Donald.

“Ay, but he was a murderer, and that I know full well, and can prove it to you, though I doubt not that ye know it well enough already, so I may just spare my breath! Begone, I tell ye! and never seek mouth-speech of a child of mine again, if you wish not for a father’s curse!” said he.

“I do not believe it for a moment,”

said Donald, "my father was an honest man, as honest, and maybe, more so than many another who does not hesitate to take away the character of the dead, though they may have feared to do so beforehand. However, I never wish to go where I am not wanted, so I will wish you good evening, and I will take very good care I don't enter this house again till I can *prove* your words false!"

"Donald!" pleaded Janet, "don't leave us in anger! may be father is mistaken."

"*May be* he is mistaken!" echoed Donald, indignantly. "He *is* mistaken, and I will prove it to him some day!"

"Janet, I forbid you to speak to that man," said Andrew; "shut the house door and go upstairs to your bed, you graceless hussy!"



So Janet crept softly upstairs to her own little room in the roof, while Donald strode off into the darkness, angry at his reception, and still more at the insinuations against his father's fair fame.

All seemed changed. A few short moments before he had been in the hey-day of cheerful prosperity; now a curtain of thick, heavy cloud had fallen between him and the light, and he was determined to grope his way out of it.

Donald, in spite of his love of adventure, was rather slow of mind, slow, that is to say, in taking in a new idea, but when once he had mastered a subject he clung to it with peculiar tenacity, turning it this way and that way, and sifting it thoroughly to the bottom.

If this accusation were true, he could not stay in his native village to be scorned and hooted at, as he knew he should be, if the malice of his enemy proclaimed his disgrace. No, he could not bear it! There was a spring in his nature which bid him break the ties that bound him to that spot and go off into the wide world again.

What were the ties that bound him to Lashiels? They were not many. He was an orphan, and had been brought up by an uncle and aunt, and now he returned to find his aunt dead, and his uncle living with a daughter of his by a former marriage, of no kin to Donald. There was one tie which he could not bear to break.

How could he leave Janet?

Yet there was no troth plighted be-

tween them. In all the years that he had been away, he had thought of her as his child-companion, his play-mate—a merry, pretty little girl; but now that he had seen her again, and had seen how beautiful she had grown, there had come into his mind the knowledge that he had loved her all these years though he knew it not.

No, he could not leave her; even though he might not see her, he would stay near and see what came of it. Right would be sure to prosper in the end, and he had the firm conviction of an honest man that right was on his side.

## CHAPTER III.

“When a world-clinging spirit would struggle and die  
With a wasted tear and a fruitless sigh,  
The bowed flower that in heaven hath put its trust  
Shall rise in fresh beauty out of the dust.”

JANET had retired to her room in a mist of unrealized suffering. Something had happened, what she could hardly yet attempt to define, but something which took the zest out of her life and turned her for the time being into stone. She had sat on till the chill night air made her shiver, and mechanically at last she had gone to bed;

Morning at length came, and with her waking moments, calmer, clearer thoughts.

We never know a sorrow till it has been a night with us. It is on awaking after a heavy slumber, that we realize that something has happened to us; something that is not a dream, but a constant companion from which we cannot fly; a burden which we are obliged, perforce, to lift up and carry about with us in all our duties and projects, and which we cannot lay down for a single instant. She rose early and went about her duties in the dairy as usual, and it was not till her mother's pale timid face peeped in at the door, that Janet realized that it would be possible to have sympathy in her trouble.

“Oh, mother! I feel as if an east wind were blowing over my heart, and

as if nothing would ever grow or look fresh there again," she said.

The pale wintry sun was just rising feebly mid clouds and scudding rain-showers. The air was cold even in the kitchen, but in the dairy, with its stone floor and grated windows, it was almost unbearable.

Mrs. Macpherson's nose was red and her face pale with the cold, and her voice shook as she replied to her daughter's pitiful lament.

"Dear Janet, don't you fret," she said. "Father did not mean what he said last night; besides, even if a man's father is a murderer, that does not make him one himself; and after all, there are many other young men, if this one is a bad one."

There was a bathos in this speech; a rigmarole of feminine and illogical reason-

ing, that made Janet smile in spite of herself. It amused her to see her mother's perplexed look as she doubted in her mind what next to say; and as she stood shivering in the cold, divided between the idea that her beautiful daughter might choose for herself among the lads of the whole hill-side, and a desire to mete out justice impartially, by proving to the world that a murderer's son need not necessarily be a murderer also.

It is strange how near akin are tears and laughter. April weather is very common all the year round, especially with young women who have a love affair on hand.

Janet was young, and naturally of a light-hearted and buoyant disposition; and when the comical side of the picture showed itself to her view, she woke up to

the fact that perhaps after all she had taken too gloomy a view of matters last night, and that all would come right in the end in spite of her father's violent ways.

He had been at the cattle-market, and though usually a sober, and even an abstemious man, might it not be possible that he had been enticed into drinking more than was good for him? If so, perhaps it was the whiskey that had excited him so much the evening before!

Youth is hopeful, and by the time her butter was made Janet had worked herself into a far more comfortable state of mind.

Her father, too, had business at a distance from home that day, and would not be back till late at night; so at all events there was a whole day's breathing-time before she need dread any fresh scenes.

But we must hasten on till we catch up



the story at the time of Sir Archibald Morton's evening stroll on the yew-tree terrace.

More than four months had elapsed since the *fracas* between her father and Donald, and Janet had heard very few words more on the subject.

Donald never came near the house, that was to be expected ; but on Sundays he sat behind them in church, and Janet could hardly contain herself as she heard his rich voice joining in the hymns.

After service, too, he would always wait at the door to catch them as they left the church, and though at first Janet shook with fright lest another and more terrible scene should be enacted between her father and her lover, at which the whole hill-side population should be called upon to assist, gradually her fears subsided, as she noticed how her father's

eye quailed beneath Donald's fearless glance, and how hastily he shuffled off homewards, not seeming to notice Donald's greetings to his four daughters.

It was a poor and meagre satisfaction that weekly meeting, but half a loaf is better than no bread, and Janet lived upon this scanty meal till the next Sunday came.

She had never had an opportunity of a word in private with Donald till that very evening in June when he found her wandering listlessly in the meadows, and had explained to her his prospects and his present mode of life.

"I have got the post of under-keeper, Janet," he said, "and my work will keep me very near you, at all events."

"I am glad of that," said Janet, simply. "I am glad, and yet sorry too, for I am always afraid of a meeting between you and father."

“You need not be frightened, Janet, dear,” he said, “I am old enough and big enough to take care of myself.

“Can you at all tell what father meant by what he said?” said Janet timidly. She was afraid to mention the terrible word her father had made use of, but Donald understood her in an instant.

“I am on the track, dear,” he said. “I am busy making inquiries amongst people who know something both of your father and mine, and if what I suspect is true, I do not think my poor old daddy need rest the worse in his grave, whatever others may do between their blankets.”

Janet looked up quickly as he spoke these words. A new fear had suddenly come upon her. What did he mean by what he said? The sight of the sweet, pale face, down which the tears were now chasing each other in big drops, which

gleamed in the moonlight, and the sound of her trembling voice, instantly melted Donald's heart, and he hastened to reassure her.

He had spoken at random, he said, he meant nothing by his words; at all events, in seeking to prove his father's innocence, he need not and would not try to prove another's guilt.

It was at this point in their conversation that the young laird had shown himself to them at the terrace steps, and the knowledge that their interview had been seen, and might possibly be commented upon, put Janet into such a state of fright that she was inclined to rush instantly off home.

"You shan't go yet, Janet," said Donald, holding her fast by the hand. "I shall not let you go till you give me a promise never to doubt me whatever

happens. Promise me to believe that I am acting honourably, whatever others may tell you. Promise me that you will trust me to the end!"

He spoke vehemently, and in his agitation and earnestness he grasped Janet firmly by the arm, as if he expected her to run away and hide from him and to shun him for ever.

But she was far from wishing to shun him. She merely looked quietly up at him and said: "Of course, I will trust you, Donald; I would as soon dream of doubting myself as of doubting you."

So he could not but believe her.

"Janet," he added, "remember, whatever happens, that you and I belong to each other. Is it not so, dear?" he added, softly, as he took her hand between his own two strong ones.

"Of course," said Janet, and she looked

at him so naturally and guilelessly, that Donald trembled.

"She is too open," he thought, "too simple about it to be really in love with me; it is only the old friendship and a sort of sisterly affection."

But he was mistaken. Janet had given him the best of her heart, and of her heart's love, and what the best of such a heart as hers is, let him who knows think himself fortunate, no matter in what walk of life he may find himself.

As for Donald, though he trembled for a moment, as he fancied it was only a sisterly regard which Janet had for him, still his natural vanity was soothed by her perfect trust in him.

He was a very human being after all, though undoubtedly a fine fellow and a real hero in Janet's eyes. It was a source of great satisfaction to him to

know that there was a woman in the world who cared for him deeply, and, though without the smallest particle of vanity, he accepted the belief of her affection readily.

But after all was it only affection, or was it love?

So, while Janet glowed with delight in an ecstatic day-dream, Donald chafed a little at being, as he imagined, the object of a merely Platonic love. It was a strange, wild phase of self-delusion through which he was passing, instructive, perhaps, but hardly pleasant for the time being.

As for Janet, she knew that though she was going back to her old, lonely life at the farm, among her cows and her pans of cream and rolls of butter, to say nothing of the human companions hardly more sympathising, still she was going

back with such a warm, happy glow in her heart that neither the chill of neglect nor the cold of disappointment could seriously hurt her.

What did the whole world signify to her now? She and Donald understood each other, and had promised to be faithful and true to one another till death, ay, and through death to all Eternity.

While Donald was fretting a little at her calmness, which he took for want of fervour and passion, he was in reality quite incapable of fathoming the depth of that pure, clear love of hers. It did not so much *fill* her life as it *was* her life, and being so, she could no more measure it than she could have meted out her own life-blood and stood by to count the drops.

Donald was giving her all that it was in his power to give, all his strength of feeling, all his power of affection; that



which he had never before given to any human creature he was now lavishing upon her, and he could not help the thought that what he gave was too precious to be wasted. With Janet such a thought could never have troubled her, for her whole heart had been given to her lover from the days of her early childhood, and she could not change now.

If she seemed cold, it was only because the idea that they were all-in-all to one another was not a new one to her, but had been natural and obvious for years past.

Donald could not understand this. He had been fond of the little girl who had been his companion and play-mate; indeed he had loved her as a big boy loves a little, tender sister; but that was all. It was only when, on his return

from his wanderings, he saw Janet as she was, that the new fire of love lighted up the old embers of affection, and he knew that she, and she alone, was the one being in the world for whose sake, and at whose side, the battle of life would be worth fighting. Hers was the truest and deepest love; but his was the strongest and most apparent, and so he contrasted hers unfavourably with his own.

“Oh! Janet, if you only knew how I love you;” he murmured, as they reluctantly parted, and she smiled a sweet tender smile, which meant that she did know, and was quite satisfied; but which he read to mean quite the reverse.

Is it true about the little rift, I wonder, about which the poet sings?

Is it true that by-and-by it will make the music mute? The music was sweet

enough, at any rate that evening, under the shadow of the tall Scotch firs, and by the flickering light of the pale moon!

## CHAPTER IV.

“In the wood where shadows are deepest  
From the branches overhead,  
Where the wild wood-strawberries cluster,  
And the softest moss is spread,  
I met to-day with a fairy,  
And I followed her where she led.”

A. P.

SIR ARCHIBALD MORTON soon regained his health under the influence of the pure air of Lashiels, and there seemed no end to the amusements and interests which he and his sister, Petronel, found for themselves. Sometimes it was a ride over the hills, sometimes a fishing expedition, or a picnic with some of their country neighbours, all of whom

gladly welcomed the Lashiels party amongst them.

Petronel was herself an ornament to any society, and as she and her brother were not deterred by distances from riding or driving about the country, the circle of their acquaintances soon spread in every direction.

One morning they were standing ready for a start, as they had arranged to join a picnic to a lovely spot at some distance.

Petronel was looking even more than usually blooming, with the fresh colour in her cheeks and the golden light in her beautiful hair, shown to the best advantage by the dark blue feather in her hat.

Sir Archibald was going to drive his sister in his mail phaeton, and was putting on his driving-gloves as he stood at the hall door.

Suddenly a quick sound of horses' feet was heard, and a groom rode hastily up to the door with a note in his hand. It was directed to Miss Morton, and though that title really belonged to Grace, it was so generally given to Petronel, that she opened the missive unhesitatingly.

"I say, Archie, Colonel Power has had an accident, so the picnic is put off. It was lucky we got the note in time to stop us, was it not?" said she.

Sir Archibald went out to make inquiries on the subject of his friend's accident, which proved to be a severe one, a fall from his horse having resulted in compound fracture of the arm.

Petronel seated herself at the writing-table to indite a note of condolence, and had just finished it when her brother came in again.

"Well, Pet," he said, good-humouredly,

“where shall we go? As the trap is waiting we may as well have a drive, though we can’t go to the picnic.”

“No, thank you, Archie,” said Petronel, rather shortly, “I don’t care to go anywhere to-day. If I am disappointed in any arrangement for one day, I never care to do anything else; it was very provoking of that stupid man to go and get thrown from his horse to-day of all days in the year; why could he not have waited till to-morrow?”

Archie gazed at his sister with amazement, as she spoke these words. With all her faults, her hastiness of temper, and her dislike of contradiction, she had never been unfeeling before; some fresh freak seemed to have come over her, and it was hardly a becoming one. Archie had often expressed his belief that the profoundest and most inexplicable

problems were women; so he merely raised his eye-brows, shrugged his shoulders, and turned quietly on his heel, casually remarking to Grace as he passed her :

“Weather variable, wind shifty, clouds impending, look out for squalls. Whenever I see the storm-signals hoisted; I make for a safe port.”

As he did not care for a solitary drive, he ordered the carriage to be sent back, and arming himself with his fishing-tackle set out for a stroll down the river.

It was a lovely morning, fresh and bright, with delightful deep shadows under the trees, which spread their branches with most inviting coolness along the river's bank.

Fresh from the glare and bustle of London, and still a little languid after his long illness, Sir Archibald Morton



thoroughly appreciated the sweet harmony of that quiet country scene.

There may be very splendid music in a crowd, but how often is there not some jar in it, some little crack within the flute that will widen slowly and imperceptibly, and at last make the music mute.

It is an old story—that longing, dissatisfied feeling which comes over us in the midst of a throng, and in the heart of what the world calls “merry-making.” Sir Archibald Morton was very far from being what may be called a sentimental young man; no doubt he had his finer feelings, his deeper, inner self; but as yet the surface life was a very untroubled one, and day after day glided by, leaving very little mark upon his life.

The glory and sunshine which had rested on his boyhood had not faded yet, and very little of the freshness of the

young Eton boy had been trodden out of the tall handsome man by contact with the world.

There are some people who give one strongly the idea that their characters are clad with the plumage of the dove. They may rub and jostle against others tainted by the less pure things in this world, but yet they do not become soiled in the contact.

Archie's nature happily partook of this peculiarity, and the well-spring of his life had hitherto flowed on untroubled and unpolluted.

He was blest with a strong power of enjoyment, and in that particular he was more highly gifted than half the young men of the present day. Every breath of the soft balmy air, every smile of the beautiful sunshine found an echo and an answer in the clear fountain of his soul.

It was this power of appreciation that prevented his being spoilt by the flatterers.

He took the world as he found it, and believed it to be bright, charming, and amusing, and it never for one moment struck him that it was possible the charm might be broken, were it not that he was young, eligible, of large fortune and ancient descent.

He was used to being petted and made much of, and no doubt, had the world suddenly found cause to turn upon him its cold shoulder, he would have been exceedingly uncomfortable and annoyed, but at present, never having felt the chill, he refused to believe in its existence. Petronel's moods were almost the only clouds that flecked his fair sky, and to them he was getting so used that he regarded them as mere matters of course.

“ It would have been the very day for a drive,” he muttered to himself as he climbed a railing, and let himself down to the river’s brink.

“ It would have been the very day for a good drive along the mountain side; the nags are in first-rate condition, and would have spun along famously. However, a wilful woman must have her own way, and luckily for me fishing is a pursuit that may be undertaken without company. I should be jolly enough here all day long, without a soul to speak to. I can’t understand what fellows mean by getting bored with their own society. I am never tired of mine, but consider myself a most agreeable companion. What is it that some fellow says, ‘ My mind to me a kingdom is.’ ”

In such manner his thoughts ran, and he was, as he said, perfectly contented,

as he paced the green walk along the river's bank, and made ready his fly for a cast.

Time went on, and his basket was already getting heavy, when the deep shadow of an oak-tree, by the side of which grew a graceful birch, was too tempting to be resisted. "Come," he said, "'Something attempted, something done, has earned a night's repose,' as the poet says, so I think I am entitled to a little rest after my labours."

He flung himself at full length on the mossy sward, and with a cigar between his lips, resigned himself to the *dolce far niente*.

The stillness was most delightful, and he lay there long after his cigar was finished, until by degrees his thoughts grew more and more confused, and his dreams became no longer waking ones.

The graceful birch, the bright rowan, and the ugly pollard willows which threw reflections as of hump-backed men into the clear waters, all were strangely jumbled together; the god of dreams waved his enchanted wand, and Sir Archibald Morton slept. His fishing tackle lay idly at his side, and taking advantage of the silence a knowing old trout, who had been watching him for the last hour, as he threw his flies as traps for the unwary, now emerged from his hole and gave a leap of delight in open stream.

The undulating meadow lands lay basking in a golden haze.

The bubbling splash of the waters sounded like some monotonous lullaby in the drowsy Summer atmosphere.

Sir Archibald slept on, unconscious of everything, unconscious of fate as she

came nearer and nearer to him, unconscious of the tidal wave that was coming to disturb the smooth and placid surface of his life. And even as he slept, while the trees cast shadows over him, and a bee buzzed lazily in the depths of a fox-glove at his side, his fate was coming surely and unmistakably upon him.

It was coming, and the way in which it came was this.

Janet Macpherson had been sent by her father on a message to the smithy, which stood at the other end of the village from the farm. She had done her business, and, tempted by the beauty of the day, she had yielded to its influences and allowed herself the rare pleasure of a walk by the river-side.

It was so pleasant and so cool under those sheltering trees, it was so seldom now that she found time to ramble along

those grass-grown pathways, amid the confusion of trailing branches and bright wild-flowers, that she enjoyed it more than ever.

Enjoyed it fully, even though her heart was very sad; for the quiet beauty of the scene seemed to chime in wonderfully with her feelings, and to suit her present state of mind. She had worries enough, poor girl, both in her daily life at home, and in the secret recesses of her heart.

Her father had never again alluded to the awful accusation he had made against David Inverarity, Donald's father; he had never again spoken of that scene, and it had struck Janet more than once that he was sorry that it had ever taken place; but he was not more cordial to Donald, though he did not openly insult him.

He would pass him on a Sunday with



a sulky scowl, which went to Janet's heart, though Donald did not seem to be much moved by it, and he showed no sign of recognition when he chanced to fall in with him at other times.

Better the heaviest chain that evil fortune can mould than that wilderness of life where fear casts out love, and feeds for ever on itself to its own torment. Andrew's temper grew worse and worse from day to day. It seemed to feed on every trifle, and gained strength from the nourishment thence derived.

There was no freedom except when the tyrant of the house happened to be away. His passions were now constantly at explosion point, and with not a spark of pity in the lurid fires of his rage and hate.

Janet was much in the position of Andromeda, bound by a chain of firmly

riveted links to a rock, and waiting for Perseus to come and set her free.

But poor Perseus, though he had all the will, had not at present the power to come to her aid.

Wonderfully free, considering the weight of her bondage, Janet felt that Summer's day as she sauntered quietly along under the trees.

She was going back in imagination to the happy hours which in years gone by she had passed in that wood. The graceful fronds of the ferns, half uncurled as they were, reminded her of the old stories which Donald used to tell her, of the fairy-power in fern-seed to render its bearer invisible. How often she had longed as a child to prove the truth of the legend! But she never even in her wildest visions had longed for it so ardently, as she did at that moment,

when coming suddenly round a sheltering bank of a tree, her foot caught in the loose fishing-tackle which lay on the grass, and, to her horror, she found that in disentangling it she had aroused the young laird from his mid-day nap.

Oh ! for the fern-seed, or the invisible cap of those dear old fairy-tales !

Janet was fairly caught now, and Sir Archibald, awakened suddenly by the twitching of the line which lay across his hand, looked as much amazed as if he too had been wishing to be in fairy-land, and had had his wishes gratified. Janet was the first to speak, though her voice trembled and her face flushed at the suddenness of the rencontre.

“I beg your pardon, Sir, I am sure,” she said nervously, as she stooped to get her foot clear of the cord, which had twisted itself round it. “I had no idea

anyone was there when I came round the bank."

Sir Archibald Morton was, in plain English, completely taken aback. In his semi-sleepy condition he could not for a moment realize what had happened, and as by degrees his consciousness returned, he began to feel more and more confused.

He had gone to sleep in a calm and tranquil mood, contented with himself, and with the whole world, and now he awoke to find himself, for aught he knew, the laughing-stock of the lovely young woman who stood before him.

He sprang to his feet in an instant, and was surprised to find what an increase of confidence seemed to be his when he stood upright.

"So you caught me napping, Miss Macpherson," he said, "what a lazy

fellow you must think me; but to tell you the truth, I had been fishing for a long time, and this shady bank was too tempting to be resisted."

Janet smiled a little, re-assured by his pleasant, frank manner, but still feeling horribly shy and longing to be off.

But the fly had now caught in her dress, and in her increased nervousness her hands trembled more than ever, and every moment the tangle became more inextricable.

"Let me help you," said Sir Archibald. "It was really very careless of me to have left my line lying there, but I never thought of anyone coming this way when I gave way to my lounging propensities."

"I know it is not a public pathway, Sir," said Janet, blushing more than ever at the thought that she was being

accused of trespassing. "I know it is not a public pathway, but my father had permission to use this road as a short cut to the village from the late laird. I hope I was not intruding."

"Not at all," said the laird, as he stooped over her to help her with the fish-hook.

What a troublesome hook that was; surely it was very firmly stuck in the dress, to judge by the length of time Sir Archibald took in extricating it!

At last it was out, and Sir Archibald looked upwards at that beautiful face for a look of thanks to reward him for his labours.

It *was* a beautiful face, as it bent down in confusion at him, as he knelt on the grass at her feet.

It was very embarrassing to Janet to find herself in this predicament, and

she could only feel thankful that there was no one else there to see her.

“I am afraid I have torn the dress with my awkwardness,” he said, “but at all events the hook is out now, and I am only glad that it did not hurt you. I should never have forgiven myself if it had done so.”

Janet was free now, the hook was out of her dress and the line wound up, and she felt as if she ought to go home as quickly as she could.

“Thank you, Sir,” she said, “I am afraid it has been a troublesome business, and now I must wish you good afternoon, as my mother will be expecting me home.”

“Let me walk with you” said Sir Archibald. “I was going to take this basket of fish to your mother, and you must show me the shortest way to your

house. I am sure this is a very pretty walk by the river, my fishing has never taken me so far up the stream before."

Janet felt uncomfortable, she hardly knew why. There was no harm in Sir Archibald Morton walking with her; as he wanted to be shown the way. Certainly no one could blame her for allowing him to accompany her; and yet somehow, in her secret heart of hearts, Janet would not have liked Donald to see her with the laird as her companion.

I do not know if Janet had ever heard of that amiable and benevolent lady who exercises such influence over the world, but certainly her thoughts, if she could have put them into words, would have been: "What will Mrs. Grundy say?"

Sir Archibald did not seem at all out of his element as he walked by her side along the river's bank. He was going to



do a little piece of politeness to one of his tenants; what more natural than that he should ask that tenant's daughter to show him the way to her father's house? He did not ask himself how it would have been had the tenant's daughter been an ugly, awkward lass, instead of the vision of youth and grace that now moved along at his side.

The earth was daintily carpeted with flowers—white, yellow, and purple were blended in the mosaic with the soft green ground upon which they trod, and which seemed to yield so softly and elastically to their feet.

The cool splash of the river, and the tender coo of the wood-pigeons, mingled softly in low waves of sound.

No trace of man, or of every-day, hard-working life was to be seen. It was a deep, luxurious solitude, the very place of

all places in the world to spend long, happy hours in, while the gnarled roots of the trees offered such tempting seats with bright green velvet cushions of soft moss.

Fain would Sir Archibald Morton have lengthened the path through the woods; but Janet was in no mood for idling, so she kept up a brisk pace, and he had no excuse ready by which he could urge her to delay.

They walked on together side by side, and soon relapsed into very easy conversation.

Sir Archibald was astonished to find how much Janet knew of the river and its windings, where the best pools for the trout were to be found, and how far it was from the famous salmon-leap in the valley beneath them. Janet had so often wandered through those woody glades

with Donald, that they were very familiar to her, and she knew every nook and corner of the wood.

Soon they emerged from beneath the sheltering trees, and crossed a low meadow which led to the farm.

The rooks were strutting about, glossy in the sunshine, while the quiet, stolid sheep nibbled on stupidly at the sweet grass.

Janet looked very pretty as she crossed from the shade to the sunshine, and Sir Archibald became more than ever attracted by her. He noticed, as she looked up fearlessly now in his face, how clear her eyes were, and what a depth of colour there was in them. Then her hair was of exactly his favourite shade, soft brown, turning golden as it caught the light.

There was a fine, sensitive intelligence

in her whole expression, which disclosed that there was in her a nature more than usually loveable and womanly.

Across the narrow wooden bridge and up the path to the farm-house Janet led the way, and Archibald followed in a sort of hazy dream.

Mrs. Macpherson was standing at the door, scattering golden grains of corn to her poultry, which clamoured noisily around her.

“Mother, here is the laird,” said Janet, as she opened the wicket-gate, and showed Sir Archibald the short cut to where her mother stood.

“I have brought you some fish,” said Archie, as he took his basket from his shoulder and disclosed its shiny contents.

“I am sure, Sir, it is very kind of you, and my good-man will take it as a great act of goodness on your part; he is par-

ticularly fond of the river trout, and we get but little of it now."

Mrs. Macpherson was a shy, nervous-mannered woman, and stood twisting her apron round her fingers, and curtsying at intervals in rather an abject manner; and the laird could not help contrasting her want of ease with the elegant simplicity of her fair daughter, whose manners were charming from their perfect freedom from constraint, and from any attempt at stylishness.

He nodded good-naturedly to the three younger girls, who sat together working in the porch, then with a courteous farewell to Mrs. Macpherson and Janet, he took his departure and walked rapidly homeward.

## CHAPTER V.

“Why must I be acting so,  
 Beggar in this comedy?  
 ’Twill be tragedy for me,  
 Albeit for the others no.”

CALDERON.

ARCHIE’S *tête-à-tête* walk with Janet Macpherson had not been entirely without notice.

When the shadows of the trees had tempted him to lie down and rest, the beauty of the day tempted Grace Morton out with her sketching materials, and she soon found a cosy corner under an angle of the wall of the garden, where she could at the same time find an undisturbed seat

and a view worthy of her artistic powers.

Grace was devoted to her art, and soon became so absorbed in her painting that she took no heed of time.

“I want some figures to give life to the scene,” she said to herself, as she leaned back and held her drawing at a distance from her, to judge the better of its effect.

She had hardly uttered these words when two figures appeared on the little wooden bridge which spanned the stream, just at the very spot where they added most to the pictorial effect.

Her clever fingers were soon at work, adding them to her drawing, and she was delighted with the reality they gave to her half-finished picture.

“I should say that fisherman with the basket on his shoulder was Archie, if I could be sure of my eyesight at this distance, but I don't know the other figure,

and I think it hardly likely that Archie should have picked up a stray woman to walk with," said she.

She worked on at her painting, happy in her own thoughts, and interested in her work, and nothing came to interrupt her till at length a quick step was heard, and Archie bounded up the rocky plateau, and flung himself laughingly at her feet.

"Well, Brownie," he said, "what have your clever little hands been about to-day? You have chosen a charming corner, completely removed from the busy hum of men, and only my brotherly instinct could have found you out."

"Is it not lovely?" said Grace. "I am so glad you came. I felt quite selfish at keeping this lovely view to myself all the afternoon."

"What has become of the lady-mother?" said Archie.



“ She has gone to call at the Manse,” said Grace, “ and Petronel said she had letters to write, and that she wanted to be quiet, so I left her to her own devices.”

“ Let me see your drawing,” said Archie, and as he spoke he raised himself to look over her book.

“ Very pretty ; I like the way you have caught the light on the waters ; and how capitally you have got in those two figures,” said he.

“ Do you know, I thought at first the man with the fishing-rod was you ; but I must have been mistaken,” said Grace.

“ I never looked so picturesque, Brownie,” said Archie, evading the question.

He knew not why he did so, it was quite contrary to his nature to have any concealments, and there was no harm in his casual meeting with Janet Mac-

pherson; but some how he did not care to speak of it, so he let the subject drop.

Grace was so utterly guileless, so entirely unsuspecting, that she never even noticed his change of manner. Janet had something about her so refined, so above the style of the ordinary young women of her class, that Archie saw in a moment that she was not a person to be lightly spoken of. He did not expect to be understood, even if he expounded his views on this subject, therefore he very wisely and prudently held his tongue, and let his sister drift off into other topics of conversation.

Grace was very proud of her handsome brother. He was always so tender in his manner to her, so understanding, and altogether so winning and frank that she could not choose but love him. She saw from her own quiet corner, whence

she observed much, how popular he was in society; how the young ladies brightened perceptibly as he drew near them, and the mothers contrived to show him that he was ever welcome as their guest.

She liked to watch him as he passed unspoiled through rivers of polite speeches, and to see how innocently and calmly he took all this social flattery.

He was charming wherever he went, but never so charming, so entirely after her own heart, as he was when alone with his mother and sisters.

Certainly, there is no such crucial test of a young man's character, as that of a quiet home-circle.

If he is good-tempered, pleasant, and social at his own fire-side, you may be pretty sure that his light laughter and pleasant conversation are not so much

the uniform to be worn on parade as the habitual clothing of his daily life.

Archie was fully appreciated by one person at all events, and that one person was a good judge of character. Grace seemed somehow to have the power of reading her brother's heart with wonderful clearness, and Archie had always liked her to do so hitherto. It was a new sensation for him to have anything which he wished to conceal from her, and yet instinct told him that on the subject of Janet Macpherson and her beauty, he had better be silent for the present.

"You will give me that sketch when you have finished it, won't you, Brownie?" he said, presently. "I will have it framed and hung up in my study at Glen Auchmuty."

"You shall have it, certainly," said Grace, "but I do not really think it is

worth framing; and after all, I think a conventional old woman in a red cloak and with a bundle of sticks on her back would look better than those two figures do. Let me do you another view from the same point, if you wish to have one to frame."

"By no means," said Archie, rather hastily, "I have set my affections on this particular drawing and I know you will give it to me."

"You are a spoilt boy," said Grace, "I suppose you must have your own way as usual, though I am sure I could do you a much better picture if you would only let me try."

"Let us go in now," said Archie, "I think it must be nearly dressing-time, and I heard mother's voice talking to Pet just now, so they will be wondering what has happened to us."

When Archie returned to the house, and sat at the dinner-table a little later in the evening, he looked at his young sister, and though he could not help seeing how very lovely, how striking-looking, and how refined she was, yet he contrasted her somewhat unfavourably with the beautiful girl he had seen that day for the first time, and whose face had made a very strong impression on him. He believed that he had discovered one of those brilliant gems, those lovely flowers which have hitherto shone and bloomed unseen.

When the next morning came, and Sir Archibald suddenly discovered that he had business at the farm, and that it was absolutely necessary that he should see Andrew Macpherson on the subject of a road he wished to have widened, it was rather a shock to his feelings

to see his wood-nymph suddenly transformed into a working bee. Entering the kitchen, he beheld, instead of a poetical scene, rather an unromantic reality.

Janet was standing before a deal-table making pies. There she was, with her pretty hands well covered with flour, and her graceful figure disguised in an enormous white apron, with a bib pinned over the body of her dress.

Every thought in her small head was apparently absorbed in the trimming and crimping of paste. He expected her to blush and look ashamed at being caught in such a homely guise, or perhaps to beat a hasty retreat; but Janet had that natural refinement strongly born in her, which gave a dignity to all she did, and it no more struck her that she demeaned herself by working with her hands, than

it would have struck Petronel that she lowered herself by pouring out the tea. She continued her pie-making very serenely, while the young laird gave Mrs. Macpherson messages to give to her lord and master. She stood looking so modest, and so utterly unconscious of herself and of her attractions, that Archie's respect for her rose in proportion to his admiration of her simple beauty.

“Pet would never have stood so naturally to be looked at as she did, by Jove!” he said to himself, as he took his way again along the river's bank. “What a difference there is in women! I don't call Pet vain, but one can see at a glance that she knows she is a beauty, whereas this girl looks as if she troubled herself mighty little about her appearance. She certainly does not



seem to court admiration, and I should question if she ever looked at herself in the glass, if it were not that that pretty wavy brown hair of hers is so carefully and neatly arranged."

Oh, for the shade of Werther, and of his Charlotte and her immortal bread-and-butter!

Archie went home convinced that every lady ought to know how to cook, and would do it too, if she only knew how picturesque she might look while moulding pie-crust.

I am afraid you will say that Archie had taken the disease in a very virulent form, when I tell you that the big, brawny, cheery, but prosaic young laird, who had always laughed to scorn the tender passion, and had shown a sort of sublime pity, not unmingled with contempt, for its victims, was actually

guilty, a week later, of attempting to write an ode to the rustic beauty, who had quite unconsciously entangled his heart in her web of Fate! But the Nymphs of Parnassus refused to fly to his aid, probably because they thought it would be a waste of time, and so Archie's ode, like so many other literary productions, never saw the light. I only mention that he attempted to soar into the heights of poetry, to show what a state he was in. If all lovers who write odes to their ladies' eye-brows, would only do as Archie did, and tear the paper into a thousand atoms, I am afraid the world in general would say that the gain outweighed the loss!

## CHAPTER VI.

“Surely, thought I,  
This is the lace of Peace’s coat.”

GEORGE HERBERT.

ARCHIE’S state of mind was not noticed in his family at first. He was out of doors a great deal, and Petronel complained that he did not so often respond to her suggestions of taking her for a ride or drive as formerly; but to this complaint, he had always some good excuse to give about the improvements on the property wanting a master’s hand, and she was obliged to yield to reason. Lady

Morton looked at him with motherly pride. "Dear fellow," she would say to Grace, her usual confidante. "Is it not charming to see how he adapts himself to circumstances, and takes an interest in everything? I had no idea he would be such a good country-gentleman! How pleased your dear father would be if he could see him now!"

And with a gentle sigh of mingled resignation and satisfaction, Lady Morton would put her soft white knitting into her basket, and move gently towards the window to watch her son's active figure, as he descended to the valley by the steep rocky steps.

Grace loved to see her mother and brother together. It was such a pretty sight, she thought, to see Lady Morton's trust in her son; and hitherto he had always responded to it by a frank and

winning confidence. Was it a little mote in Grace's eye that made her fancy that something, almost imperceptible at present, was rising up in his manner to his mother, and that now and then he tried to evade answering her questions? She hoped it was, and blamed herself for being suspicious, yet over and over again the little shadow came over her. The little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, seemed to be about to appear on the horizon.

Lady Morton saw nothing, noticed nothing, and as for Petronel, that young lady was too much occupied with her own affairs to have time or thought of observing what she would have called "trifles."

But Grace was a close observer. She possessed the rare gift of valuing and arranging trifles in their proper proportion, without allowing her mind to be frittered

away by them. She had a true artist's appreciation of the value of accessories, both in the outer world of nature, and in the inner and more complex world of human characters. Grace had that rare combination of a high spirit and a sweet temper, and these, together with her good abilities and high order of intellect, made her a very charming creature, indeed, to those intimate enough with the family to know her well.

So while Archie smiled and talked as usual, and seemed the same as ever to his mother and Petronel, only Grace saw that something had happened, or was happening which had changed him. Perhaps it was only an impatient glance from the window, a quiver of the lip, or a quick flash of the eye. Perhaps it was all or none of these things, but Grace had quick perceptions, and like a thorough-

bred Arab horse, she scented danger in the air.

Grace loved the quiet of her little boudoir, and into it she retired now more than ever, as Lashiels was full of guests, and voices and merry laughter rang through the old house, and Petronel was in her glory.

Never had she looked more lovely; the excitement of entertaining company brought a colour to her cheek and a light to her eyes that were perfectly dazzling; and as she stood one morning at the open window of the dining-room, her head resting against the dark oak paneling of the wall, the sunlight playing in the waves of that wonderful golden hair, and one beautiful hand toying with a jasmine bough which peeped in at the window, she made a perfect picture.

Her violet dress fitted her beautifully,

and showed to advantage the snowy whiteness of her throat; and Archie paused in his conversation to look at her and almost wonder at her loveliness.

“She is a beauty,” he thought, “but what a difference in that attitude, that got up pose, and the other figure I see in my mind’s eye, making pastry, and looking very lovely without any air of striving for effect?”

Colonel and Lady Katherine Anstruther, their two daughters, and Lady Violet Ogilvie, the orphan niece of Lady Katherine, were among the guests, besides Mrs. Becket, Major Armstrong, the Honourable John Poyns; and three or four bearded and whiskered young officers.

Mrs. Becket was a widow lady, middle-aged, lively, and with a certain originality which made her always good company. In fact young men



were in the habit of saying that there, was sure to be some fun when Mother Becket was amongst them.

Altogether it was a well assorted company enough, and Petronel managed to keep them all well amused.

One there was amongst the number, however, who seemed sadly out of place, and that was Lady Violet Ogilvie; shy, timid, and almost childish as she was, the conversation which she heard, babbled on around her as a brook might babble, while she, the little tender violet blossom, understood not its language.

She was very young; not seventeen in fact, and had been at school till now with a widow lady who took pupils, and whose late lamented husband had been college tutor to Lord Audsley, Violet's father. Now, however, she was without

a home, her father having been killed by a fall while out hunting, and, having left no son, the title and estates had descended to a nephew.

Violet was now domiciled with her aunt, Lady Katherine Anstruther, who was kind to her in a good-natured, careless manner, but of whom poor Violet stood in great awe.

Her cousins, Marion and Helen Anstruther were several years older than she was; and as they had had the experience of several seasons in London, and travels by land and by water half over the world, to give them confidence, they had no power of sympathy left for the little shy, frightened bird who had fluttered into their nest.

They did not understand her; they did not mean to be unkind, but they treated her as a child, incapable of entering

into or taking interest in their pursuits.

They prided themselves on their individuality, and had each adopted a line of her own, so that as they did not clash, they remained a very fairly affectionate pair of sisters.

Colonel Anstruther was a cultivated man with refined tastes; but he seldom spoke of them in his domestic circle, for he had that inherent shrinking, so well known to a finely organized person, from having his pet ideas trampled upon, or torn to rags by beings unable to comprehend them.

He had no son, and his daughters took after their mother, and rather prided themselves on their bluff outspoken manners, which they called sincerity.

Violet was on her way to the High-

lands with them, and was looking forward to the scenery she should see there, but on this head her cousins were a little contemptuous.

“Scotch hills are all very well for school-girls to admire, but *we* have seen half the mountains in Europe, so we don't care to disturb ourselves by looking at the views in the Highlands.”

Violet had not seen half the mountains in Europe, but she had seen the Cumberland hills, and they had in some degree filled her heart when it was very empty and cold and desolate, and she was grateful to hills from that time forth.

Indeed, when she had been carried off from her home in the lake district and placed at school in London, the poor little uprooted flower pined for its native soil; and almost the happiest moment of

her school-life was when, one day, she managed to hold a long conversation with a poor Tyrolese boy, who clung to his little marmottes in memory of his mountain home.

“Ah! Mademoiselle,” he said, “the air of the cities stifled me. In the mountains God is near us, here He is, too, without doubt, but you cannot see Him; there are too many wicked people. When I think of my own mountains here in this great noisy place, tears come into my throat and I long to scream out loud.”

Violet could fully sympathise with the little exile in his “Heimweh.” He had expressed so exactly what she felt!

The mountains did seem to her as to him a sort of religion. Through nature the purest and simplest minds can ever draw nearest to the God of nature, and Violet's deep dark eyes might have told a

tale of her pure and simple faith had any one cared to seek it out.

“Love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned,” was what Nature had taught her to feel for Nature’s God.

She was so very shy and reserved, and kept herself so entirely in the background, that her aunt, Lady Katherine, who had at first tried good-naturedly to draw her out, found so little response to her kindly efforts, that at last she came round to her daughter Helen’s opinion—that it was much better to leave her to herself, as there was evidently nothing in her, so it was only a waste of energy to try and find it out.

That lovely morning when Petronel’s somewhat studied attitude had jarred against her brother’s ideas of good taste, the conclave at the open window were

busy discussing a plan of proceedings for the day.

“What do you say to our going *en masse* to the grand summer fair in the market-town?” said Petronel.

“Capital,” said Major Armstrong, “let us go and see the natives disporting themselves. I give you credit for having started a most brilliant idea, Miss Morton.”

“But, my dear,” said Lady Morton, “the town will be full of roughs, and the flags and bands will make the horses frisky! What do you say, Archie?”

“Say, mother! Why, that you should do exactly what you like best. If you are afraid of the noise and bustle, why should not you take Colonel and Lady Katherine Anstruther to call at Borthwick Castle, and we will put ourselves under the wing of Mrs. Becket, who, I am sure,

will take us to the fair, if we are good boys and girls," said Archie.

"To be sure I will, and give you some fairings, too, if you like," said Mrs. Becket, entering into the project with ready alacrity.

The Anstruthers had brought their own carriage, so it was soon agreed that that was to be kept for the elders, and that the juniors were to pack themselves as well as they could into a large wagonette and the mail-phaeton.

"What time shall we start?" said Petronel.

"Better wait till after luncheon," said Archie. "I promised to see about the felling of some timber at the farm this morning, but after lunch I shall be at your disposal."

"What an interest your son takes in country pursuits!" said Lady Katherine.



“Yes,” said Lady Morton, “he has taken immensely to this place, and not a day has passed for the last fortnight without his going to the farm about some road-making business; I often think how it would have gladdened the heart of his dear father if he could see him so usefully employed.”

Lady Morton heaved a little sigh, and wiped her eyes, as she always did at any allusion to her departed husband.

“*Le Roi est mort, vive le Roi!*” was, however, rather her feeling; and Archie was now the head of the house, so her love for her son was mingled with respect for his position.

Archie did not see Janet that morning. Since he had taken to visit the farm so often of late, Janet began to feel more and more uncomfortable. She was so modest, and had such high ideas

of conduct, that she did not like being made the subject of conversation, as she was sure was the case, among the farm lads and lasses about the place ; indeed, one evening while alone in her dairy, she overheard the cow-boy say in a loud voice to one of the maids.

“What makes the laird come by so often, Molly !”

“He’s after the young missus, I’m thinking,” replied Molly, with a little laugh, which rang through Janet’s ears, and covered her with blushes.

Tears of vexation sprang to her eyes, and though she was quite alone, a feeling of shame crept over her.

“Oh, Donald !” she said to herself, “if this horrid mystery was but cleared up, and I could be yours in the full light of day, no one would dare to speak of me so !”

That evening Molly got more sharp words from Janet for upsetting a milk-pan than she had ever before experienced. It was natural that Janet should vent her wrath on her, but it was hardly politic either, for it only confirmed Molly in her ideas.

“She is fairly set up with her proud notions,” said Molly, compassionately.

So it happened that Janet, as soon as she had caught sight of Sir Archibald Morton's now familiar figure, ensconced herself in the dairy among her pans of cream, and Archie, having no excuse for following her, returned rather disconsolately to Lashiels.

Climbing up the steps which had become his usual track now, he thought he would see after his guests and get some of the men to take a stroll before luncheon; when suddenly his at-

tention was arrested by a little moaning sob, and looking round hastily he saw Lady Violet Ogilvie crouched on the ground, evidently in great pain, but still frightened at having attracted his attention.

“Lady Violet!” exclaimed Archie, “what has happened? have you hurt yourself?”

“I slipped over those steps, very stupidly, and I am afraid I have twisted my foot; but I think I shall be able to walk soon,” she said, timidly.

“Can I help you? will you take my arm?” said Archie. “Come, that is bravely done!” he added, as with the help of his hand, she raised herself from the ground. “We shall soon get to the house now,” he said, as he placed her hand on his arm, “I am an excellent walking-stick.”

But the colour had quite gone from her lips, and Archie saw, to his horror, that she had fainted.

He was about to call for help, when the remembrance of Lady Violet's shyness stopped him.

"Poor little girl," he said to himself, "she would be awfully distressed if any fuss was made about her, so I will take her to Brownie, she will know best what to do with her."

He lifted the slight burden in his arms, and walked towards the house.

She was tall, but very thin, and so slightly built that she was extremely light, and Archie, whose arms had now quite recovered their strength and muscle, found no difficulty in supporting her weight.

Grace's little boudoir was in a quiet corner of the house, and a narrow path led up to her window.

Up this path Sir Archibald Morton carried his unconscious burden, and looking down on the pale face he noticed for the first time what good features they were, and admired the length of the dark eye-lashes which rested on the marble cheek.

"She will be pretty some day, perhaps," he thought, but the ideal of beauty ever present to his mind was of such a different type of loveliness, that Lady Violet suffered in comparison.

He heard the sounds of music from the drawing-room, where Petronel and the Misses Anstruther were inveigling Mr. Poyns and Captain Burns into some glee-singing.

"All right, they won't see us," he said to himself, and then walked up to the window of the boudoir. Grace was alone, sitting on a low chair reading.

She started up as her brother's shadow fell across her page, and in an instant she saw what was amiss.

She opened the French window, and Archie stepped in and deposited his still unconscious burthen on the couch.

"She has twisted her ancle, Grace," he said, "I found her out by her moaning among the ferns of the dell. Poor girl, I am afraid she is badly hurt; I brought her to you, as she is such a timid little fawn, I thought she would be more at home with you than with any one else. I fear that formidable aunt and cousins rather sit upon the poor child."

"Quite right, Archie," said Grace, "I am glad you thought of bringing her here; and now if you will go and call Nurse Thorn, I am sure she and I can attend to her without interfering with any one else."

Archie did as he was bid, and soon Nurse Thorn, an old and valued servant of the family came to Grace's room, and between them they soon revived the patient, bathing and binding up the poor little foot, and tucking Violet up most comfortably on the sofa.

"What a dear old woman, and how kind you both are to me!" said Violet, when nurse went off to get some soup which she prescribed for her patient.

Grace seated herself by the couch, and with her work in her hand talked so pleasantly and merrily that Violet forgot her shyness and became quite at her ease.

Grace watched the eager face light up and the dark eyes kindle as she caught a new idea, and she thought to herself that here was a charming piece of real unsophisticated nature, delightful to see.



“You must call me Violet,” said the girl, “it is so stiff to say ‘Lady Violet!’ and I hope you will often let me creep into your room while we are here. I will be very quiet and not disturb you, and it is oh! so much nicer here alone with you than with all those people.”

“Indeed you are quite welcome to come here as often as you like,” said Grace. “I shall be delighted to see you whenever you come; but now I must go to luncheon, I will make your excuse to the rest of the party, and say you are going to spend the afternoon with me instead of going to the fair. I am sorry you should miss the drive, though, poor child!”

“Oh! if you only knew how much happier I am here!” said Violet.

“What? sprained ankle and all?” said Grace, laughingly, as she left the room.

Violet lay there peacefully and thought of many things. The pain in her foot was easier now, and she had not felt so happy for a long time as she did now. There was something in the atmosphere and general appearance of Grace's room, that carried Violet back to the days of long ago, when she had been allowed as a great treat to sit with her own dear mother in her boudoir.

Alas ! that mother was gone now, and the old house, about whose stately walls so many of her earliest recollections clung, had passed into other hands.

But Violet hoarded up her memories as her richest treasures, and thought over them many and many an hour when the uncomprehending world might have thought her very dull. There was a yearning in her gentle, refined nature for sympathy which she hardly realized

herself, but which left a very aching, empty place in her heart.

She had never had many to love her.

Colonel Anstruther was her guardian, and Lady Katherine was her aunt, and they were both very kind to her in a sort of way, but she wanted more, and what it was she craved for she hardly knew.

She had found a soft little nest now; this poor fluttering little birdie, and Grace was so kind and so understanding that she could not feel shy of her; so for the present she was content. Grace came back to her very soon with a plate of fruit, and a whole history of the start of the merry party, which she told with such real fun and humour that Violet, who generally took every opportunity which presented itself for hiding away from a number of people, almost began to wish she had been of the party.

“No, I don’t though,” she thought; “for it is much better to lie here and be amused with Grace’s account of it.”

Grace’s room was a sort of guide-book to her mind.

She had, as she explained to Violet, very few of her possessions with her at Lashiels, but on the table was a basket filled with moss, ferns, and rosebuds, while a splendid “Gloire de Dijon” rose had the honour of a glass to itself, and backed by a graceful spray of maiden-hair fern, formed the central ornament of a small work-table, drawn cosily near enough to the low chair in which Grace usually sat, to give an air of private property to it.

The few pictures were good; some were photographs from the old masters, and stood on little low easels on the tables; others were choice engravings hanging on the walls.

The books were well bound and carefully selected, and the very titles of them gave Violet a home-like feeling, they were so much after her own heart.

“ Oh, Grace ! if I could always live with you ! ” said Violet. “ It is just my idea of peace and happiness, ” and Violet nestled down among her pillows, and privately hoped that the pain in her ankle would last during the remainder of her visit to Lashiels, that she might have an excuse for enjoying the seclusion of Grace's room.

## CHAPTER VII.

“If maids be shy, he cures who can,  
But if a man be shy—a man—  
Why then the worse for him!”

J. INGELow.

WHEN Petronel had so curtly refused her brother's offer of a drive on the occasion of her disappointment at the failure of the picnic, she little knew the complex web she was helping to weave with the meshes of his fate.

It was not so much that she was vexed at losing a piece of gaiety, for she had had so much society in London, and be-

fore that in country houses, that a picnic more or less could very easily be dispensed with.

But it had come to be a fact to which she could no longer blind herself, that the presence of Major Armstrong it was that made the charm to her in all the gatherings she went to in the character of *prima donna*. It was not that he paid her attention ; indeed, so surfeited was she with the admiration of the crowd that she sometimes fancied that the reason she thought about him at all was because he seemed to heed her so little.

It was the spirit of contradiction, so largely developed in her, which gave a zest to her feelings. It was the *agro dolce* sauce to her life. She was tired of the sweet, so a little touch of the bitter gave a flavour and piquancy to the dish.

Major Armstrong had been staying with his friend, Colonel Power, at the time of his accident, and it was the thought that she had missed seeing him that had vexed her so much. She was not in love with him, she told herself, and, indeed, I do not think she was ; but she had so long been accustomed to the soft and tender rose-leaves of life's pathway of prosperity, that a slight prick from one of the thorns was a new sensation to her.

Petronel was what may be called, a very wide-awake young lady. She knew her own value in the estimation of the world. She had youth, beauty, and good birth, and she determined to make the best of these attributes in a fair fight with the world.

Of course she should marry, and, equally of course, as it seemed to her,



she should marry for position. A title; wealth and its accompaniments, she looked upon as her just rights, and of her just rights she determined that she would not be defrauded. She had accordingly sulked during the better part of the day, which had been such a marked one in Archie's calendar, and had only recovered herself when her brother had told her that he also had sent notes by the groom that morning, asking Major Armstrong and Mr. Poyns to come to Lashiels, instead of finishing their visits to the Powers.

Mr. Poyns and Major Armstrong would have done very well had they been shaken up in a bag, Petronel thought. For the former was heir to a title and to large landed estates, while Major Armstrong was heir to nothing but his father's debts.

Petronel knew as well as possible that

if *Barkis* (alias Poyns) could screw up sufficient courage to tell her that he was *willin*, she might be the future Lady Delabole, the mistress of a splendid house and grounds in Sussex, many acres of rock and moor in Cornwall, and of extensive slate-quarries. But Mr. Poyns was a shy man, so shy that his efforts at conversation were both ludicrous and painful; and, as Petronel knew quite well he was her devoted slave, she was in no hurry for him to make the stupendous effort of telling her so.

The Honourable John Poyns was young and tolerably good-looking. He had had advantages, like other young men of his station; he had been sent to Eton first, and then to Oxford, had travelled on the continent; he had been dragged reluctantly and sorely against his will

through a regular tread-mill of London engagements, but it was all of no avail.

The veriest chit of a school-boy had more *aplomb* than he had, and less difficulty in conversing with strangers.

Ever since he first cast his eyes on Petronel's beautiful face, her image had filled his heart. Archie had said to her at the time,

"Why, Pet! that poor fellow was struck dumb at the sight of you."

To which Petronel had replied,

"I am very sorry, Archie, but that was *really* not my doing, it was a freak of nature's."

He stayed in different country-houses, because he was too shy to say *no* when his friends asked him; but the agonies he underwent, whenever he was called upon to face a fresh set of strangers,

would have been enough to have immortalized him as a martyr, had they been endured in a worthier cause. So he stayed at Lashiels, and looked literally unutterable things at Petronel, and Petronel thought of herself sometimes as the future Lady Delabole with some degree of complacency.

“At least,” she said, to herself, “I may feel very safe that, if I do marry him, my husband will never flirt with anyone else; he could not do it, you know, if he tried, and he is not likely to make the attempt.”

Captain Burns and the other “fellows from Carlisle,” as Archie called the two inoffensive-looking young men, whose moustaches and opinions were in an equally budding condition, were each and all distinctly in love with Petronel; but she cared not for that, she was so

accustomed to wholesale flattery that she only accepted it as her due.

What did fret, and, because it fretted, interested her, was Major Armstrong's scrupulous politeness but utter lack of homage in his manner to her! If he happened to be standing near the piano when she moved towards it, he could not avoid opening the instrument, lighting the candles, &c. He did it all with the polished grace of a man of the world, but Petronel could see it was only common politeness, and nothing more, and the knowledge that it was so was very galling to her.

Mr. Poyns was always hovering near her, inwardly raging at the coolness with which Major Armstrong arranged her music stand, and then would lounge off to a sofa where sat Mrs. Becket. Mr. Poyns was longing, I say, to be of

use, but he was too shy. Some hidden force held him back and rooted him to the spot where he stood, even when a loose sheet of the song which Petronel was about to sing escaped from the desk and fluttered to his feet. Captain Burns had picked it up, restored it to its place, and stood ready to turn over at the right moment, before honest John Poyns had had the hardihood of even making an effort in that direction.

Once he got so far as to try to open the door for his divinity, as she was about to leave the room, but his feet became hopelessly entangled in the skirts of Mrs. Becket's elaborate dress, and after a frightful crack in what is technically called the 'gathers' of that garment, resounding through the room, Mr. Poyns could do nothing but retire,

crimson and confused behind an ottoman, while Petronel tripped merrily away, casting a bright comical look over her shoulder at the rest of the party.

“Bless the man what a Goth he is! and his father, old Lord Delabole, such a courteous old beau!” said Mrs. Becket in a loud aside to Helen Anstruther.

Happily the blood was surging and boiling at such a rate in the victim's ears, as to render him absolutely deaf; for Mrs. Becket's asides were rather audible ones. Marion Anstruther, who set up for a blue-stocking, was pouring into the ears of an unfortunate young man a great deal about the science of Metaphysics.

“You know,” she was saying, “you know of course, Mr. Green, that Abelard held *doubt* to be the condition of mind most becoming a philosopher, while his

great opponent Bernard, replied to him by insisting on the limits of the human understanding and contending for *belief* as an essential."

"No! 'pon my word, did he though?" said Mr. Green abjectly, as he stood first on one leg and then on the other, looking vainly for a chance of escape.

"I entirely agree with Bernard, Miss Anstruther," said Major Armstrong, "and I think his case may be said to be proved in this instance most satisfactorily!"

Marion Anstruther stared; she was like many vain people, extremely superficial in her knowledge, and though she liked to air long sentences and deep theories, at which she had caught in a smattering, slipshod way, to sound imposing to the uninitiated, she was



not prepared to argue with a really clever man as she knew Major Armstrong to be. She did not know that he was so near her, or she would never have ventured upon such an harangue.

She did not see the point of his speech, but only gave him a blank, displeased stare.

It was so evident that there was a limit to her understanding, as well as to that of the unfortunate Mr. Green, that Major Armstrong was immensely diverted, and, in his quiet way, greatly enjoyed the joke.

Looking up to see if anyone else had noticed it, he caught sight of a pair of dark eyes, with an unusual sparkle in them, and he saw that the little, demure Lady Violet Ogilvie was the only one who had been quick enough to catch the point of the joke.

For a moment a quick glance of intelligence and a sparkle of real fun lighted up her face ; but when Major Armstrong moved towards her to try and get her to talk, she was once more the frightened little nun with downcast eyes fixed demurely on the ground.

“We certainly have two instances of great shyness amongst us,” thought he, “but I question if either Poyns or Lady Violet would show the limit of their understanding so quickly, as that awful woman who spouts long words without understanding them.”

“Are you a blue - stocking, Lady Violet?” he asked, sinking quietly into a seat by her.

“Oh, no ! indeed ! Why do you ask ?” she replied.

“Thank heaven !” he rejoined. “I should not like you at all if you were !”

“Oh ! wouldn't you ?” said Violet. “I thought it was nice to be clever !”

“Clever ! yes,” said Major Armstrong, “really clever is what all may wish to be ; but there is immense difference between a clever woman and a blue, and there are shades even of the blue, too. I question whether some ladies who ape the reputation would find that the garments they delight in donning are of a very durable dye.”

“You mean that for my cousin Marion ?” said Violet, quickly.

Major Armstrong bit his lip, he had quite forgotten the relationship between the two ladies. He was re-assured, however, by Violet, who was becoming far less shy than usual, under the influence of the quiet corner where they sat undisturbed.

“I am sure you mean that my cousin

Marion is not really clever, but that she only likes to be thought blue," she continued.

"Far be it from me to insinuate anything of the kind, Lady Violet," he said; "if it had not been for your quickness and penetration, I should never have been discovered in my wicked laugh at the 'limited understanding company,' so I must throw myself on your mercy, and beg you not to betray me."

Violet looked amazed.

"*I* betray you, Major Armstrong?" she said. "Of course I would not do anything so dishonourable!"

He was pleased and amused at her earnestness, and determined to take advantage of her being in a communicative humour, to draw her out.

"Lady Violet," he said, "do *you* like blue stockings?"

Violet made a funny little face, and shook her head, then, fearing she had done wrong, she corrected herself and added,

“Not when the dye comes off at the first rub; but I suppose when there is real talent that is not the case?”

“So you like a little shade of blue in the hose, only you like the dress worn long enough to hide it?” he added.

“Ah! it is the display I dislike so very much,” she replied. “I should like to be like Grace, she is perfection.”

“Grace?” said Major Armstrong, inquiringly, “who is she?”

“Miss Morton, I mean,” said Violet; “she has been so kind to me: when my foot was hurt, she let me come to her room and lie on her couch, and I assure you I have not been so happy since I was quite a little girl as I have been during

these four quiet days. I do believe she knows everything, but she is so modest, and never talks about it as some people do."

"Major Armstrong, do come and look at these photographs of my pet dogs," said Petronel, coming up to them at that moment, and Major Armstrong could not choose but obey; but he left his little quiet nook rather unwillingly, and with a decided impression in his mind that Violet and her ideal of perfection, Grace, were the two people best worth cultivation in the house.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“Will you walk into my parlour,  
Said the spider to the fly.”

THE injury to Violet's ankle had not been a very severe one after all. It soon yielded to the kind and skilful treatment of Nurse Thorn, and Violet was almost sorry when it became obvious that she need no longer excuse herself, on account of her lameness, from joining in the excursions of the others.

The party was soon to break up.

The Anstruthers were to carry Violet

off to their Highland fastness, and the Mortons were to start for Glen-Auchmuty, in preparation for the 12th of August and St. Grouse. Marion Anstruther inflicted no more metaphysics on unfortunate Mr. Green; indeed as Major Armstrong remarked to Violet, the "limited understanding company" appeared to have dissolved partnership, and it was hard to say which of the two shunned the other the most.

Marion boasted that she had no soul for art; so with the convenient non-clashing arrangement which existed between the sisters, Helen took it up, and talked so magnificently about sunset effects and "chiaroscuro," that Major Armstrong could not resist a mischievous inclination to draw her out and make fun of her.



Helen was obtuser than her sister Marion, and never discovered the drift of his remarks ; but began to flatter herself that she had made a very agreeable impression on Major Armstrong, and plumed herself not a little on his polite attentions.

Meanwhile Archie became more and more silent and distraught. He hardly listened to Lady Katherine, as she sat next him at table, and he quite failed to see the point of Mrs. Becket's best stories ; indeed, as that lady astutely remarked to Captain Burns, whom she had taken particularly under her protection, there would soon be not a pin to choose between him and Poyns for stupidity."

It was Mrs. Becket's habit to take entire possession of one young man, and confide to him all her ideas on the

rest of the company. It was also her habit to omit their titles when speaking of men, and to treat them as if they were a parcel of school-boys.

“It’s a good thing Poyns will come in for those slate-quarries some day.” she whispered behind her fan, “I am sure there is one loose on his noddle; and as for Archie, I am convinced he is in love, only for the life of me I can’t tell with whom. It can’t be with either of those charming creatures whom I call Science and Art, and he never speaks to that shy mouse, Violet Ogilvie. It can’t be with anyone here, that’s very certain.”

Meanwhile Archie had advanced considerably in his intimacy with the Macpherson family; Andrew was civil enough to him; indeed he would have been fawning and cringing, if he had not seen that that

sort of thing would not go down with the laird.

Andrew had his own private reasons for keeping on good terms with his landlord, for he very well knew that he was behind-hand with his rent, and that he had not kept his land in as good order as he ought to have done.

He had had money losses, which told upon his health and temper, and from which his family at home suffered, though he did not confide to them the cause of his irritability.

Then his favourite colt got loose from the boy who was leading it by a halter, and injured itself so severely that it had to be shot. His cows caught the rinder-pest, and many of them died of this terrible disease.

It seemed as if a blight had fallen upon him, for from every quarter fresh mis-

fortunes came upon him. The villagers whispered and laid their heads together, while they agreed that it was evident Macpherson had an enemy who had evil-wished him, but no one dared to make any comments on the subject to him himself, as his temper was too well known for anyone lightly to run the risk of raising it.

Andrew was a shrewd man, and he soon saw, plainly enough, in what direction it was that the laird's eyes so often strayed.

“Eh ! but his father would have been just mad, if he saw the fancy his son has taken up ; but it is not for me to interfere, it would be another business altogether if it was any other body's daughter that he was favouring.”

At first, Archie had been frightened by his own feeling for Janet. It was so

impossible, he thought, for him to marry beneath him, and so bring disgrace and unhappiness into his home. It would break his mother's heart; it was not to be thought of. Nevertheless, he did think of it all the more, because he told himself that such an idea was impossible.

It would alienate him from his family, it would estrange him from his friends, it would ostracise him from society—he must give up all thought of it.

A marriage between the laird of Lashiels and Glen-Auchmuty and the daughter of a tenant! Between Sir Archibald Morton, baronet of ancient descent and pure blue blood, and the child of a small farmer! The thing was absurd, he told himself over and over again, as he lay tossing restlessly on his bed at night, unable to sleep, and unable to calm his nerves from their unnatural fever

of excitement. And yet, whenever he closed his eyes, the vision of that beautiful face haunted him; and, with a groan, he would begin again the series of objections to the marriage, and ever as he went over them he would strike off mentally one after another, till it seemed feasible after all.

Why should he not marry whom he pleased? His wife would take her rank from him, and no one should dare to look down upon her in his presence!

Besides was not Janet lady enough to grace any rank? Was she not fit to be a duchess! a queen indeed?

Then he would ramble off to himself again a little incoherently about natural grace, inherent refinement, inborn gentility, and a whole list of set phrases, till at last he fell asleep to dream of a sweet face shrouded in a bridal veil

and a small hand in a white glove clasping his arm. Then would come the waking in the morning, the breakfast table surrounded with cheery faces, and his mother's tender smile as she gazed on her darling boy, her ill-concealed anxiety at his loss of appetite.

All this would unsettle him again. He would just go down to the farm and have another look at Janet, and then he would try to make up his mind to go off to Glen Auchmuty and forget her !

But the going to the farm for another look always ended in the same way, and Archie would come back more madly in love with Janet than ever.

Many times he resolved to talk to Grace on the subject, and get her advice and sympathy, but the knowledge that Violet was so often in her boudoir stopped him.

“You see, Sir Archibald,” Andrew would say, when the laird expressed his sympathy with his misfortunes, “it is not for me or for my poor wife that I mind so much, though I’ll not deny our losses are heavy on us all; but I do feel it for my girls! It cuts me to the heart to think that they must suffer; and though you may smile and think me foolish, Sir, being an old man, and naturally partial to my own flesh and blood, as you may say, I’ll not deny that I am proud of my girls, and should like to see them respectably and happily married before I die.”

And the cunning old fellow wiped his eyes with his coat-sleeve, apparently much overcome by family affection and his own pathos. While at the same time his restless grey eyes gleamed mischievously beneath his shaggy eye-brows and he was watching



Sir Archibald's countenance with the greatest interest.

"Of course, of course!" said Archie. "It is only natural that you should be anxious for the welfare of your family, and as to being proud of your daughters, why, there is nothing to be ashamed of in that! Any man might be proud to call such a girl as Miss Macpherson, his daughter, and still prouder to call her his wife, she would well adorn any station in life;" and Archie, at that moment, catching sight of Janet, as she nailed up her roses in the garden, ran off to her assistance, leaving Andrew Macpherson with an evil light in his wicked grey eyes and a sneering smile on his lips.

"Ay! ay! they are all alike, this laddie is just as daft as the rest, and all for a bit of womankind; but I have got him on the hip now. I must go and

show him that I don't mean him to slip out of the noose he has put round his neck, in a hurry."

So saying, he walked towards the corner where Janet, blushing, and looking very much vexed and annoyed, stood talking to Sir Archibald.

"Janet, lass," he said, in his most offensively mild voice, "you must pick a posy for the laird; he has just been so condescending as to say he wishes to have a rose from our poor garden. It is very kind of him to care for anything belonging to us, when he has such beautiful flowers at his command elsewhere. So mind, lassie, give him the best you can find."

With a meaning glance, first at one and then at the other, the wily old spider left them and returned to the house.

Archie stood for a moment speechless,

what had he done? He had not meant his words to be taken in that sense, he had a confused memory of having said that Janet was fit for any rank of life, and that any man might be proud to call her his wife; but he had not intended Andrew to take it as a hint for permission to address his daughter, though it was evident to him that Andrew had taken it as such.

However, it decided him, and he did not require much persuasion to make him almost glad that he was so far committed, that as a man of honour he could not now draw back.

“If the father takes it in that light, and leaves me purposely alone with his daughter, what can he mean, but that he is willing to permit my addresses?” was his reflection. No thoughts of the honour he was about to do Janet was

in his heart. She was so beautiful, so good, so far above him in every respect except one, that he never dreamt that it was a condescension on his part to ask her to be his wife. All his arguments for and against such an alliance, which he had gone through so often, were scattered to the winds.

At one glance at the graceful figure before him, the demon Prudence vanished, and the angel Love remained in entire possession of the field.

“Miss Macpherson,” he said, and he addressed her as courteously as if she had been the greatest lady in his acquaintance. “Miss Macpherson, your father has hinted to you what I have come here to-day to ask for.”

It was an entire delusion that he had come to ask for anything, but Archie believed that he spoke the truth, and

lovers' delusions are often very swift and sudden.

Janet was dreadfully frightened; she stood with her eyes cast down, her small hands trembling so violently that the dead leaves she had been cutting from her rose-bushes were shaken out of the basket she held, and fell in a shower of crimson and brown at her feet. There was an old wall behind her and an angle of the house in front, so they were quite alone and unseen. A lark sang high in the great blue vault overhead, and one of Janet's pet doves uttered a low cooing sound almost incessantly.

A distracting sound is a dove's coo, and Archie felt as if he could have wrung the bird's neck with pleasure, for interrupting with its aggravating and monotonous voice the peaceful stillness of this interview.

“Janet,” he said, “your father has told you what I want, I want the fairest rose in all your garden, will you give it to me?”

There was no answer—Janet remained silent; but a nervous twitching of her mouth convinced Sir Archibald that she understood him, though she made no response.

“Oh, Janet! you do not know how I should value it. I would wear it near my heart for ever!”

He was going on to say more, but he saw that Janet had raised her eyes and was looking at him, as if she was trying to speak.

“Sir Archibald,” she said, her voice trembling with agitation, “I will not be so silly as to pretend not to know what you mean, but I must tell you once for all that you must never speak to me again

in this manner; think of your lady mother, think of your sisters, think of all the friends of your own rank of life. What would they say? What would they think?"

"I do not care what anyone says or thinks, but you, Janet," added Archie impetuously. "Janet, you know I care for no one as I do for you? You must know it; and I shall die if you do not promise to be my wife."

He had caught her hand between his own. "You must, Janet, you must!" he cried. "I cannot live without you!"

But Janet drew herself up, and with a queenly dignity that commanded his respect, as much as it increased his admiration, said—

"Sir Archibald Morton, I suppose I ought to thank you, Sir, for your condescension, and for the honour you have

done me ; but you must understand, once for all, this must not go on. I know I am but a farmer's daughter, and you a rich gentleman ; but I have my feelings as much as if I was a lady, and I know what the love ought to be that binds two people together for life, and I have not that love to give."

"But, Janet dearest, it will come," he said ; "only say that you will let me love you, and I have no fear but that in time the feeling will come to you too!"

"No, Sir, it cannot be ; we can never be equals ; and even if there was no other reason, I would not help to bring you into misery," she answered.

Archie was in despair ; he loved her so very deeply, he could not bear to give her up. Now he had overcome his scruples and made her an offer, he felt as if he should never recover his peace



of mind if she persisted in refusing him. But she was firm ; if for a moment the dazzle of riches and splendour which might be hers glittered temptingly before her eyes, it had not time to evolve itself distinctly ; for in her heart was the true loyal love she had cherished for Donald through long, long years, and whose beginning was so remote that she could never trace it.

“ Janet,” said the laird imploringly, “ you know I had your father’s permission to speak to you.”

Janet shivered ; how well she had learned to read the expression of her father’s face. She had known quite well when he told her to give the laird the best rose in the garden, that though he spoke quietly, he meant her to obey him.

What would happen now ? How could

she face his wrath when he knew what she had done ?

Then came the bitter and shameful idea that she was to be treated as a bit of merchandise ; that her father was willing to sell her to the highest bidder.

She knew that he had money-troubles, though to what extent she was unaware. If she married the laird, her father would make him pay his debts, or at all events excuse him the rent of his farm.

It was horrible ! it was humiliating, past bearing, to think of being bartered away for gold by her own father. And Janet, now fairly overcome, covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

Archie never could see a woman cry without being moved, and when the tears fell from Janet's eyes in consequence of words that he had spoken, his penitence and agony knew no bounds.

“ Janet, please forgive me for having pained you. I would shed my last drop of blood willingly for you, but I cannot bear to see you cry. What can I say or do to comfort you ?”

She still sobbed violently, and still the tiresome dove went on with its coo, and the lark sang more merrily than ever over their heads, as if the whole performance was got up expressly for its benefit, and it was bound to give its applause.

“ What shall I do for you ?” repeated the laird.

“ Do !” said Janet wearily, “ please leave me, and never come here again.”

And Archie was fain to leave her, and sad at heart and very desolate she went quietly to her old room in the roof of the farm-house, and kneeling by the side of her little bed, sighed out the great burden of her heart. “ Oh ! Donald ! Donald ! to

think that they wish me to marry the laird ! No, though my father orders me to do so, I never, never will break my promise to you."

## CHAPTER XI.

“Where day is day, and night is night,  
Where frocks—and morals—both are white;  
Blue eyes below, blue skies above—  
These are the homes, the hearts for love.”

PRAED.

VERY sadly Archie turned away from that spot of ground hallowed to his memory for Janet's sake.

“If she had only been shy and doubtful,” he said to himself, “but there was a decision in her manner, that, I am afraid, leaves me very little feeling that she will ever change her mind.”

He plunged into the wood, and sat down on one of the moss-grown trunks at the river's brink, very near to where he had been awakened from his slumbers by Janet, when he had come face to face with her for the first time.

The foliage was getting now, what Grace called 'middle-aged' on the trees, the tender Spring greens had developed into a more uniform tint since that memorable day, and Archie's love, which had begun to bud and blossom, had now grown and strengthened in like manner, till it was no longer a new sensation, but a strong part of himself.

All else was unchanged, and Archie thought despondently that Nature herself was mocking him! The same tune was being played by the wind among the boughs of the trees, the same song was being sung by the river, that

had charmed him so much then, but to his ears they were changed; then all was harmony, now discord reigned triumphantly in Archie's senses. It could not but be a shock to a man so courted and admired as Archie had always been, to find himself rejected by a farmer's daughter; but I must do Archie the justice to say that anger against Janet formed no part of his feelings now.

She had been so much distressed, was so evidently grieved by what had passed, that he could not find it in his heart to blame her; what was there in his address that had frightened her so? Could it be that the father was a tyrant? Archie had heard rumours of his being a hard man with his work-people, but then he had certainly spoken affectionately enough of his daughters,

and had seemed proud of Janet's beauty !  
“ I hope he won't be hard upon the dear girl,” he said to himself ; “ I am sure she had some good reason for refusing me, perhaps I was too hasty, or perhaps—I never thought of that before—yes—it must be that—she must be in love already with some other fellow ! ”

Strange to say, in all his meditations and musings upon this subject in all its bearings, this solution of the mystery had never struck Archie before.

It was a horrid thought, for it made him feel more hopeless and forlorn than ever !

Poor Archie ! he was certainly very hard hit !

It was perhaps better for him—better for her—better for all parties—that his romance should be nipped thus early



in the bud, but it was a painful process notwithstanding. How foolish the world would think him for grieving thus, and yet it was a very real trouble to him. How foolish one is about these matters! what vain fancies whirl and eddy through one's brain!

Archie had lived for the last three weeks like Mahomet's coffin, hanging between earth and heaven. He had hoped that the cords were gradually drawing him upwards, but he had now been awakened with a start to find that they had snapped suddenly, and he had had a sharp and disagreeable fall to earth.

He sat for some time in the deep green solitude of the wood, when at last he was disturbed by hearing footsteps coming along the path.

He jumped up, and putting on an air

of indifference which he was far from feeling, advanced to meet the comers.

Two men in animated conversation came round the corner close to him, and he instantly recognised one of them as Major Armstrong, and the other as Donald Inverarity, the under-keeper.

“I have found an old friend and servant here; I had no idea that Donald was anywhere hereabouts. He was in my troop in the Crimea, and after that we travelled half over Europe together.”

Archie tried politely to look interested as Major Armstrong seemed to expect him to do so, but the identity between his friend's quondam soldier-servant and his own present under-keeper was nothing to him at that moment.

Had he known who Donald was, or what share he had in that black veil

of destiny which had just fallen over him, he would surely have been amazed ; and perhaps the kindly little nod with which he favoured him might have been exchanged for a scowl of jealous hate !

The fine-looking young man might have been a machine for aught Archie knew or cared at that moment. He was so occupied in wondering in his own mind who his rival could possibly be, that when that rival stood before him he took not the smallest notice of him, beyond the conventional nod with which he was in the habit of greeting his servants.

“ We were talking of our expedition in Wallachia, and of our rides with the Croats, when you came up,” said Major Armstrong.

“ Indeed,” said Archie, very absently.

Major Armstrong saw in a moment that

something had gone wrong with his host. He had known very little of Archie before this year, but he had taken very kindly to him; and he thought he saw, beneath his absent and *distract* manner, germs of a noble nature.

He was several years older than Archie in mere age, but he was still older in mind; for he had passed through burning fiery trials which had left their marks so deeply branded, that they never could be forgotten. Major Armstrong was a very self-contained man.

Many people flattered themselves that they knew him well, and classed themselves amongst his most intimate friends; but there was one page in the story of his life which he kept carefully closed within his heart, and none but himself knew the bitterness of the story it contained.

I think I hear my readers ask me, "Who was *she*?" They are quite right; the story was one of true love repaid by falsehood; of the best gift a man can bestow, trampled under foot by a heartless flirt, of laughter turned into weeping, and joy into sorrow.

It was a common-place story enough, but it had tainted Major Armstrong's whole life.

He never could be the same man again, as he had been before he knew that the woman whom he had loved so tenderly had deceived him.

So he went through life with an aching, gnawing pain at his heart, though, like the Spartan boy of old, he hid the fact so bravely that no one suspected it.

Those heartless flirts, both male and female, who think of love and hearts as toys to be played with and then broken,

as children break their playthings to see what they are made of, and then throw them aside; those heartless flirts, I say, little know the hours of agony, the lifetime of sorrow, which their conduct inflicts!

Major Armstrong had learnt the tidings of his great trial when the Crimean War had just come to an end; so, instead of coming home to England, he determined to plunge into a few years of travel and adventures, hoping that change of scene and time would gradually cure him of his wound.

Taking Donald Inverarity, his faithful soldier-servant, with him, he went to out-of-the-way places, as much for the sake of change as for the avoidance of old friends, who might chance to hit upon the one subject in conversation to which he could not yet bear allusion to be made.

Donald was a capital servant, hardy, active, and intrepid, and together they scaled mountains in Moldavia and Wallachia, penetrated into Herzegovina and Montenegro, and so passed nearly two years.

Major Armstrong appeared to strangers to be an excellent traveller, and to rejoice in even and tolerably good spirits, but no one knew, not even Donald, what an awful time it was for him !

Still he got through it somehow, and when he at last came to England, and heard that she whom he had so loved and trusted had sold herself to be the wife of a man old enough to be her father, for the sake of wealth and position, and that her husband held her as—

“Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse,”

he could afford a little pity for the woman

who had done him this wrong. He never went near her; he had discovered that the image to which he had bowed down, believing it to be pure gold, was composed of some base alloy, and that even the gilding was now wearing off. So he went his way, and led his life solitarily in the midst of a crowd, while she lived on in the life she had chosen for herself, never thinking or caring for the misery she had worked.

Major Armstrong had had other troubles, too, but nothing had hit him so hard, or wounded him so deeply as this one.

And as he gazed on Petronel, and saw her in her careless grace and beauty, reckless of the mischief she was doing, and playing with manly hearts of which her shallow nature could not appreciate the worth and value, he longed to warn those



unskilled mariners from the dangerous rocks and shoals towards which they were drifting, lured by the delusive voice of the beautiful syren.

But Major Armstrong was a man of the world, and he knew well enough that if there is one point more than another on which it is unsafe to give advice, it is on one's neighbour's love affairs, so he could only look on in pity from afar.

All this time Petronel was vexing her heart out at getting so little notice from him. She was getting provoked with Mr. Poyns, most irrationally, for his great but unspoken devotion to her.

It was tiresome to be stared at for ever by a man who was afraid of the sound of his own voice. There was a spice of naughtiness in Petronel that would not be restrained, and which

puzzled Grace sorely, occasionally, in her dealings with her. She knew quite well what was right, and sometimes she would really try very hard to act up to her principles, but they were built on shifting sand, so it was very uncertain, from day to day, on what level they might be found.

Grace now and then saw that a little sisterly advice was desirable, and might safely be administered ; and whenever she caught Petronel in the right vein she would speak, and she generally found her words taken in good part ; but Petronel was a spoilt beauty, and she was as shifty and changeable as the wind, so it required all Grace's tact to enable her to choose the exact moment in which her words of advice would be listened to with respect and attention, instead of the ninety-nine moments out of the

hundred in which they would float on the air, without having a chance of being heeded. Grace had tact in a rare degree, and that is a gift by itself, and quite apart from and different from other gifts.

For all the practical purposes of life, tact avails infinitely more than talent, it penetrates everywhere, it is not one of the five senses, but it quickens and assists all. It is an intuitive feeling that leads one to hit the right nail on the head, and to hit it so cleverly that no one can see the blow, and yet so firmly that when it is once driven in no one can take it out again. Grace had long ago discovered that there is a time for everything, and it was her fine tact which showed her when was the exact moment at which her somewhat shallow and artificial sister presented a piece of *reality* sufficient to work upon.

For Petronel was sadly unreal, that was the worst of her. Grace puzzled over her often, and never quite understood her. Indeed, the whole thoughts and habits of these two sisters were about as different as the thoughts and habits of any two people can well be. Perhaps the feeling which each had most strongly for the other was pity.

Petronel pitied Grace for her weak health and consequent enforced seclusion from the world and its pleasures, and Grace pitied Petronel for those very things which Petronel thought herself most fortunate in possessing.

Petronel never attempted to understand Grace, indeed I do not think that she ever troubled her pretty head with the idea that Grace had anything in her worth understanding; but Grace tried very hard to read the motives aright

which actuated Petronel most in her somewhat erratic course of proceedings.

Grace was fretting now a good deal over her beautiful sister's vagaries. She did not half like the way she accepted so much attention as her due.

No doubt there were great excuses to be made for one of Petronel's character and temperament in the incessant atmosphere of homage she was becoming accustomed to breathe.

Too much sweetness is apt to be cloying, and too much openly expressed admiration is lowering to a woman's mind, and is apt to make her forget the divinity in the humanity of her human face divine.

"Does she ever *think*?" Grace was sometimes inclined to ask, as she watched Petronel's apparently aimless life.

Major Armstrong watched her too,

though Petronel knew it not. He was studying her as a beautiful picture, and trying to read through and through her artifices.

“She is a dangerous girl, depend upon it,” he said to himself; “there is something to me repellent and snake-like in her beauty, though I suppose I should be laughed at if I were to say so. Perhaps it is that having felt the sting, I now know where to look for the concealed venom of such treacherous beauties.”

Poor Mr. Poyns was becoming every day more hopelessly and helplessly in love. And Petronel, without troubling herself to speak to him, or ceasing her flirtations with the other gentlemen, had a way of throwing him an encouraging word or glance now and then, which revived his spirits whenever they

were drooping, and kept him her faithful and devoted slave in spite of all her careless conduct.

Archie was too much occupied with his own affairs to notice Petronel much, and Lady Morton was one of those blind, adoring mothers who think their children can do no harm, so Grace kept the grievance to herself, but none the less did it worry her for having no one to sympathize with her. She was anxious about Archie too. He was sadly changed in these last few weeks, and she was sure there was something weighing heavily on his spirits.

She had never seen him so doleful and depressed before. Something must indeed have gone very wrong with him she was sure, or her darling brother would never avoid her as he was now doing.

Grace was longing to be up and doing ; she saw there was something in which she might be useful, and she longed to be called upon by her brother to aid and comfort him.

But Grace had learnt in her quiet invalid life a great deal that comes only by painful experience to the strong and active.

Her strength was to sit still, to remain where she was and think and prepare her mind, and arm herself at all points, in case she should be suddenly called upon to act.

Grace possessed in a large degree that fore-thought and kindness, and that real anxiety to be of service which arise from an utter absence of consideration as to "self."

She was a quiet but important member of that household—for she was a



sort of back-bone and support to each and all the others; severally and collectively.

Oh ! how she longed to make a clean sweep of all the visitors, and to have her darling brother and sister to herself again, so that she might be able to help them to (as she expressed it) ‘put themselves to rights.’

“It is of no use my trying to do it for them, they must do it for themselves if the effect is to be lasting, but perhaps I can help them,” she said to herself.

*I can help them*

## CHAPTER X.

“Scorn not the smallness of daily endeavour,  
 Let the great meaning ennoble it ever,  
 Droop not o’er efforts expended in vain,  
 Work, as believing, that labour is gain.”

S. M.

“WELL Janet lass! did you give the laird a rose? I see you have kept some of them for your own cheeks,” said Andrew Macpherson when Janet appeared at dinner after her interview with Sir Archibald Morton.

Mrs. Macpherson looked up quickly from the dish she was helping at the

moment, and gazed inquiringly at her eldest daughter.

“Never you mind her, mother,” said Andrew, “it’s nought but a bit of business ’twixt the three of us, the laird and Janet and me, and for the present you’ll do well not to interfere in the matter.”

The tyrant of the family was accustomed to be obeyed unhesitatingly by the whole household, and though he spoke in a more amiable tone than usual, Mrs. Macpherson was too well tutored to speak another word without leave.

Susan and Alice were brimming over with curiosity to know what was going on. They were fine upstanding lasses, almost, if not quite, young women in their own estimation, and already keenly excited at any idea of a love affair.

Even little Emma, fat and stolid as

she was, opened her round eyes wider than usual, to stare at sister Janet. Their father was evidently in high feather. He talked more than he had done for ages.

He handed Janet the pepper, and condescended to inform her that corn was easy, but that the cattle-market was dull and likely to be duller.

It was very unusual for Andrew to condescend to notice his daughters at all; he was generally moody and sullen in his manners, snapping at them, and snarling at his wife whenever they ventured to make any remark, and to-day his evident good temper to Janet was so marked that she felt more and more afraid of the storm of abuse she must expect when he found out what she had done. She felt as if she was receiving his polite attentions under false pretences, and the evident surprise

and awe of her mother and sisters was all the more difficult for her to bear, as she knew how dismayed they would be when they discovered the truth of the matter.

Andrew in the meantime ate his dinner with immense satisfaction, bestowing now and then sundry nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles on his eldest daughter, which were meant to be encouraging, but which were in reality quite the reverse.

Mrs. Macpherson was divided between maternal pride in Janet's good looks and the notice they had attracted, and the wifely submission which induced her obey her lord and master in all things.

Her character resembled one of those modern materials which are woven with a fine silky texture in the warp, but which in the woof are of a common and coarse description.

Janet could never quite understand her mother; at times the common homespun predominated so largely, apparently in the texture, that her words and actions were of the simplest description; then again, all of a sudden, a flash of the silky element would startle her with its brilliancy.

It was a wretched, miserable meal for Janet. She made a pretence of eating, but she could not manage to swallow a single mouthful. Food choked her.

Her cheeks grew hotter and hotter, as she marked her father's high spirits and heard his coarse jokes and insinuations.

She could not master her terror, when the knowledge that the crisis had come was made plain to her by her father's rising from the table and beckoning

her mysteriously to follow him into the best parlour.

It was a small and somewhat stuffy apartment, profusely adorned (?) with staring woollen anti-macassars, and worsted-work cushions.

It was considered rather a grand, a magnificent *salon* by the simple folk at Lashiels farm, and was never used except on those state occasions when the neighbouring farmers were now and then entertained at tea therein.

Janet shuddered as her father opened the door, and looked round to see if she was following.

Instinctively she caught hold of her mother's dress, and with a silent, pleading look drew her after her.

Andrew scowled for a moment at his wife for intruding, but the silken weft was in the ascendant, and Mrs. Mac-

pherson, with a courage she rarely manifested, returned his look with considerable hardihood, and was not to be frowned down from standing up boldly to help and comfort her daughter while she was in such evident need of sympathy and kindness. No gleam of that tenderness for suffering sad humanity, which is the most god-like attribute in man, ever softened Andrew Macpherson's stern nature.

His heart was as hard as the nether mill-stone, and about as incapable of kindliness.

On this occasion, however, he was inclined to be more lenient than usual, simply because he looked upon Janet as a means whereby wealth and power might one day be his.

“Come in here, lass,” he said, “and tell your father and mother all about it;



not that there is much to tell me that I do not know already, but your mother, may be, will like to hear from your own bonny lips that you are to be a lady, and to rank with the best in the land."

Saying these words, Andrew seated himself in the best arm-chair, planting his feet with his heavy farm-boots firmly in the very centre of a gaudy bunch of roses which adorned a foot-stool, and was evidently prepared to act as judge and jury at once on the trembling prisoner before him.

Poor Janet had lost all her roses now. She could hardly stand upright, and her knees knocked together from sheer terror.

She knew so well what a storm would come when the truth had been told; how could she venture to tell it?

Mrs. Macpherson came to the rescue,

and putting her arm round her daughter's slender waist, said.

“Leave her to me, father! the poor lassie is flurried and frightened.”

“Flurried and frightened,” said Andrew, “may-be, she's a bit excited at her good fortune; but don't tell me, woman, that she's not all the better pleased because the village maidens will be mad with envy at her good luck.”

“I've no good luck, father, and you are quite mistaken;” said Janet, forcing herself to speak, though the words came like gasps, and there was a little trembling sob in her voice.

“No good luck!” said Andrew, “heaven and earth! what does the girl mean? No good luck, to be the chosen bride of the laird, to be made a lady of, and to have jewels to wear in your

hair, and fine clothes, and carriages and horses at your disposal!"

"Speak up, Janet, dear," said her mother, soothingly, "tell us what is between you and the laird. What does father mean?"

"There is nothing between me and the laird," said Janet, as soon as she could speak.

"Nothing!" said Andrew, disconsolately. "Nothing! then what was he talking to you about when I left you alone in the garden?"

Janet was silent.

"Will you tell me, girl!" roared Andrew; then, thinking perhaps he had been too hasty, and that it was very possible Sir Archibald Morton had not yet gone the length of a proposal, he added, more mildly. "Do you mean to tell me he was only philandering to-day,

or did he ask you to become his wife?"

"He did ask me," said Janet.

"He *did*!" said Andrew, triumphantly, "then what in heaven's name, girl, are you making such a to-do about telling us? I wish you joy, my lass, and am proud to have lived to see this day."

"My darling girl! my joy! my blessing!" murmured Mrs. Macpherson, as she kissed Janet rapturously.

"Stop, mother! stop, father! I have not finished what I was going to say to you. The laird did ask me to be his wife, but I told him no, that that could never be, and I asked him to go away and not to come here any more."

Had a thunderbolt fallen into the midst of the quiet homestead of Lashiels, had the earth opened at his feet, Andrew Macpherson could hardly have been more astonished than he was by his daughter's

statement. He started to his feet, scattering cushions and couvrettes in all directions, and kicking away the gaudy footstool in his amazement.

Janet, in spite of her dumb misery, her speechless dread of what was coming next, found herself, in a sort of passive inert way, taking in the general aspect of the room, and wondering at the unwonted appearance, amidst its pretence of elegance, of her father in his coarse working dress and thick leathern gaiters. It certainly was a thoroughly incongruous scene.

There was a sort of air of got up finery about the furniture. The coloured prints which adorned the walls were resplendent in their gilded frames, the smartly bound books were placed at regular intervals on the table, in the manner which Mrs. Macpherson was

accustomed to consider the height of elegance. The basket with wax-flowers, with faded colours and broken petals, which occupied the centre of the chimney-piece, had once been the pride of Mrs. Macpherson's heart, and she could hardly consent to Janet's fancy for a bouquet of fresh real blossoms to be placed on the table, as in her private heart of hearts she thought Nature's gift too cheap and common to have a place in her best parlour. It was Janet's whim, however, and as she was such a good girl her mother did not like to thwart her; but she could see no beauty in the graceful groups of ferns and flowers which Janet loved to arrange, and if she had had her own way would have banished them from the scene. As the bouquet was to the rest of the room, so Janet was to the rest of the household.

She was altogether superior to her sisters, both in mind and body, and it was just her refinement which made the difference.

Andrew Macpherson remained for a moment struck dumb with amazement and incredulity.

Then, when it dawned upon him that his daughter was in earnest, that she had really meant what she said when she had confessed to having refused the grand match which had been in her power, and on which he had set his whole heart and soul, his wrath and indignation knew no bounds. Such a torrent of abuse fell on poor Janet's luckless head as it is not within the limits of an ordinary pen to retail.

Oaths, threats, scoldings followed one another as fast as the rain-drops in a heavy thunder-storm.

Andrew Macpherson was like a creature transformed, he knew not what he was

saying, and, as the torrent of passionate words fell from his lips, his wife and daughter clung to each other in infinite terror.

Trembling with fright, they gazed at the angry man, and marked how his features were distorted with rage; then his head sunk heavily forward on his breast, a sudden spasm seized him, and he fell down on the floor in a fit. Unbridled rage and passionate emotion had done their work, and Andrew Macpherson was stricken down with apoplexy.

It is strange how sickness alters the relative position of the members of a household towards each other.

Andrew, who had been the terror and dread of the whole family, whose voice had been all-powerful to rule, and whose will had always been law, now stricken down with sudden illness, lay at the



mercy of the women whom he had treated so cruelly.

His frenzies had been so alarming, and his temper so violent, that to hide from him when he drew near, had been the ordinary strategy of the younger girls.

Now he lay prone and helpless on a sick-bed, and the little mice who had been so afraid of the lion when it had been able to roar, soon conquered their old fear, and began to help their mother to attend on the sick man.

The doctor was sent for, and he pronounced it to be a sharp attack, brought on probably by unwonted excitement and agitation.

Then, and not till then, did it occur to Mrs. Macpherson to blame Janet for her share in the catastrophe.

“If it had not been for you, Janet, we should have been all as comfortable as

possible," she said. "You are a wicked, ungrateful girl, and I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself, I do, bringing trouble and confusion into a peaceful household. What business had you, I wonder, when the laird was so condescending as to wish to make a lady of you, what business, I say, had you to be so rude as to refuse him!"

"My dear mother," said poor Janet, imploringly, "don't you turn against me, too—I am so very miserable!"

"Miserable! and I should like to know whose fault it is if you are miserable, indeed!" said Mrs. Macpherson, angrily. "You don't care, I suppose, that you are breaking your mother's heart and killing your father by your conduct.—No! don't come here with your hypocrisy," she added, as Janet leant over her father, and with gentle, womanly tenderness

began to bathe his burning brow with a cooling lotion.

Janet stepped back, deeply hurt and grieved at her mother's manner, and resigned her place to Susan, who was ready and anxious to do anything that might be needed in the sick-room.

There was very little sentiment about Susan Macpherson, but a great deal of common sense.

She was thoroughly utilitarian, practical, and business-like, and quite incapable of seeing things from the same point of view as that from which Janet beheld them.

Susan had been so accustomed all her life to be bullied and worried by her father, that she had by this time come to regard his temper as a matter of course, and was not hurt by the things he said, as Janet was.

Susan stepped into Janet's place at

her father's bedside quite naturally, and Janet, finding herself an object of wrath and distrust in her mother's sight, wandered disconsolately out of doors; rambling all unconsciously till she came to the river-side. She then seated herself on a low mossy bank, and tried gradually to still her aching, throbbing heart, and to realise all that had taken place in that long and weary day.

It was evening now. The soft twilight greys and browns were enveloping the landscape, and dropping dainty cloud curtains over the trees and mountains. The sun was sinking gradually in its rose-coloured bed, and sending parting gleams of farewell glory up the mountain sides.

Poor Janet! there seemed very few gleams left to lighten up the landscape

of her life! Very few rays of brightness, but much of gloom, shadow, and darkness.

“Whatever I do seems to be wrong,” she sighed wearily to herself, as she tried to fix her thoughts and go over again in her mind the events of the last few weeks. “Whatever I do seems to be wrong and to hurt somebody! Oh! I wish I knew what was best to be done!”

By degrees her thoughts became calmer, and she was able to review the events of the day with tolerable exactness.

She was very, very sorry for what had happened, she could not bear the idea of giving pain to anyone, and she knew that the laird had suffered a great deal more than he had shown outwardly from her refusal. But how could she have

done otherwise? With her heart and her whole life's love given to Donald, how could she promise herself to another.

Her mind was very clear on this point at all events, and by degrees she began to feel thankful that there was one point on which she stood so firmly that the troubles and mists and persecutions around her did not in the very least cause her to overbalance herself.

To have one central point clearly defined is a great help in threading the intricate maze of right and wrong, and Janet knew that her love for Donald was so fixed and unalterable, that it was indeed a beacon-light in the storm, a guiding-star in the cloudy darkness of her other troubles. A sudden emergency like a sudden illness, has often

a most opposite effect on persons of opposite temperament. Janet who was by nature full of energy, activity and strength of character, was now for the first time bewildered and cast down.

For the moment she felt inclined to give all up, and to resign herself passively to whatever her parents might wish her to do.

But she was the same energetic person still, though for a moment the weight of trouble seemed to crush the life out of her.

The strength to fight for the right was still unquenched within her, and she knew that the old battle must be fought, and the old work recommenced just as if this inevitable cross had never come at all.

Janet went back to her daily work, with more calmness than she could have

thought possible, considering the unsettled state of the house, and the turmoil caused in the establishment by the master's sudden illness.

Work was the thing she wanted to settle her mind and to calm her nerves, and she was wise enough to see that the remedy lies always nearest to the hand, and the dock-leaf which grows near the nettle will cure the sting of the latter better than the remedies which we go far afield to seek.



## CHAPTER XI.

“Talk of lost hopes and broken heart! his own  
Sent such a flame into his face, I knew  
Some sudden vivid pleasure hit him there.”

TENNYSON.

“**B**LESS the people, why cannot they  
stir themselves and do something?”  
said Mrs. Becket the next morning in  
an audible aside to Helen Anstruther.

“What would you like to do?” said  
Helen absently, she had not been listening  
to Mrs. Becket, she had been trying to  
catch a conversation which was going  
on at the other end of the breakfast

table between Major Armstrong and Petronel.

“I declare it is too bad of Petronel, she monopolises all the gentlemen, and never lets anyone else have a chance,” she was saying moodily to herself, and as her thoughts were running in this direction, she did not half hear what her neighbour Mrs. Becket was saying.

“What do I want to do?” repeated Mrs. Becket rather tartly, “I don’t much care what it is, as long as it is something. I cannot bear that modern stagnation which is creeping over everyone now-a-days. It is a sign of the times. If the world goes on at this rate much longer, people will soon think it too much trouble to move from their chairs after breakfast, because they will have to come back again to them at luncheon time.”

"You think we shall arrive at making it always six o'clock, always tea-time, like the March hare in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland?" said Grace, who was sitting opposite and had overheard Mrs. Becket's remarks.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mrs. Becket. "It would take something stronger than the best butter to oil some people's watches."

"I have always been under the delusion that the world was going too fast now-a-days, Mrs. Becket," said Colonel Anstruther, "it is quite a novelty to hear anyone lament the slowness of the age."

"Well! a novelty is always refreshing. They say there's nothing new under the sun, but now and then some one does start a fresh idea, and when that is the case, I think the public ought to come

down handsome as a reward," said Mrs. Becket.

"But it strikes me that the British public does not very particularly appreciate being told to mend its paces" said Colonel Anstruther. "My experience of life is that every screw likes to be to be thought a racer, and that, if you want to grease the wheels of anyone's family coach, you must get the best butter to do it with; it is astonishing how smoothly this sort of vehicle goes on its way if it is well oiled with self-satisfaction."

"Juggernaut's car, my dear Colonel, nothing less! and I'll wager that many people stoop to be crushed under its wheels merely because its name is fashion," said Mrs. Becket.

"Fashion is a hard and exacting task-master, I allow," said Colonel Anstruther

laughing, "but I demur a little to the Juggernaut chariot idea."

"My dear sir, the votaries of fashion follow its lead as blindly now as they have always done since the old days of Solomon. Do you mean to tell me that the old king's wives did not fight and squabble which should take the pattern of the Queen of Sheba's gown, quite as anxiously as London ladies do now-a-days to be the first to get hold of Paris fashions," said Mrs. Becket.

Every one laughed at this speech, and a lively argument commenced all round the table on the subject mooted.

"You said just now, Mrs. Becket, that the age was degenerating," said Major Armstrong, "and now you go back to the days of King Solomon, to prove to

us that human nature is human nature in all ages and in all climes."

"Well, I maintain that I am right, nevertheless!" said Mrs. Becket. "'Motley's the only wear,' I am convinced."

"But it does not do to set fashion at defiance," said Lady Morton.

"No, of course not!" said Mrs. Becket; "but there is a vast difference between defying fashion and being her blind and humble slave."

"There are so many followers and so few leaders, that one cannot wonder that the public generally have such an exalted idea of custom and usage," said Grace.

"What a number of sins that noun of multitude signifying many, *the public*, has upon its shoulders, and ought to have upon its conscience, if such a vague

thing may be said to have a conscience," said Major Armstrong.

"Which of its particular sins are we supposed to be discussing now?" said Sir Archibald languidly. "I did not hear the beginning of the argument!"

"The particular sin on which Mrs. Becket is sitting in judgment is the degeneracy of the age, in wasting so much time in sitting over the breakfast-table instead of making the most of this lovely July day," said Petronel.

"Quite right, Miss Morton," said Colonel Anstruther. "I am sure we should improve the shining hour more skilfully out of doors than in the house, though perhaps Mrs. Becket will say that the *public* don't care about improving the shining hours, they only try to kill them as conveniently as may be."

"Archie, do break up this group of

philosophers, and suggest to us a plan of campaign," said Petronel.

"What do you say to an excursion to Craigmorna, and a picnic luncheon at the cottage by the falls?" said Lady Morton.

"Lady Katherine, I believe you have never seen Craigmorna, and I assure you it is one of our lions, and you ought not to leave this neighbourhood without seeing it."

Lady Katherine Anstruther signified polite pleasure at the suggestion, and the motion was accordingly carried unanimously.

"There is room for all in the break," said Sir Archibald, "and I am sure, Grace, the expedition will not tire you."

"I should so like you to come, too," he added softly to his little sister, as he followed her into the oak-panelled passage leading from the hall to her boudoir.



He looked at the open door of her sanctum, and seemed inclined to enter it with her.

He was so longing, and yet so dreading to (as he expressed it to himself) have it all out with Brownie, but as he drew nearer he saw a slight flutter of feminine garments, and became aware that Lady Violet Ogilvie was in his sister's room.

"Do you want me, dear Archie?" said Grace.

"No, dear, not particularly, but *do* try to manage Craigmorna to-day; you have not been with us in any of our expeditions, and it is just the place for you to sketch."

He spoke with assumed carelessness, but Grace knew every tone and variation of her brother's voice, and she was certain he wanted her advice and sympathy for some trouble, real or imaginary, over which he was brooding.

“Very well, dear, I will certainly go if you wish it, it is very good of you to think of me in your arrangements.”

“Am I in the way?” said Violet, emerging timidly from the room to where the brother and sister stood in the passage.

“Oh! dear no!” said Archie hastily, “I am glad you have got the *entrée* to Grace’s boudoir, Lady Violet; and now I think of it, I believe you have to thank me for your first introduction to it.”

“Indeed, I do thank you, Sir Archibald, very much. I am afraid I did not half show my gratitude to you for your kindness about my fall, and I have had such happy hours with dear Grace too; it was horribly forgetful of me never to have expressed my gratitude!”

She looked up so sweetly and simply, as she said this, that Sir Archibald Morton

was quite taken with her girlish grace.

“She is very lady-like,” he thought. “I think Grace is right to encourage her to be with her. She is worth the whole Anstruther lot put together.”

“Well, I must tell you you are in high favour to be admitted into such sacred precincts,” said Archie good-humouredly. “As for Grace, she is a most stern and inflexible lady-abbess, and lets very few people into her cloistered cell.”

“She has been most hospitable to me, I am sure,” said Lady Violet, with a little affectionate gesture to Grace, which Archie ought to have thought most winning, but which he did not think of at all, so full was his whole heart and soul of Janet and her rejection of him.

Violet, unlike Petronel, never gave a moment's thought to her graces or her powers of fascination.

She was thoroughly simple and natural, and could not have been affected if she had tried.

Affectation would never have suited her, neither would she ever have borne the idea of anything unreal. She was true to the back-bone, and open and honest as the day, but as yet her character was unformed. It requires an acute perception, a strong power of foreknowledge, to be able to see the forest tree in the acorn; and ninety-nine out of a hundred people would have passed Lady Violet Ogilvie by as a sweet-looking but rather uninteresting girl.

Grace, however, saw beyond what the world saw, and she felt very certain that there were germs of high and noble attributes in the soul of the quiet, modest girl, who seemed almost afraid of the sound of her own voice.

But Grace was too busy with her own worries and frets, just then, to be as far-seeing as was her wont.

There were two selves in Grace, as there are in nearly every human being possessing brains; the private and inner self, and the self which is our link with the rest of the world. Perhaps, properly speaking, they might be called the spirituality and the humanity of her nature.

Had she given way entirely to the first, she might have become too contemplative, too emotional. But Grace, fortunately, possessed the proper balance of power; enough of the humanity to prevent the spirituality from submerging it, and yet not enough to quench the spirit, to smother the kindling sparks of emulation and *Sehnsucht* which gave fire and character to her disposition.

With all the wealth of happiness given

her in the possession of so much heart and intellect, there was a thrill of tenderness in her soul at the idea that she was one of a fold, one single member of a large body, whose minds and souls would one day be doubtless in unison, and who, though they now walked in darkness, she knew, and rejoiced to know, would one day be brought into the marvellous light of full and perfect sympathy which we get near enough sometimes on earth to catch a glimpse of, and yet which we always somehow just contrive to miss.

“I must be off now to the stables to see if I can manage a team to-day; mind, you have promised to come with us, Brownie. Lady Violet, I hope you will keep her up to the mark,” said Archie, as he left the room.

“He is a dear, thoughtful brother,”

said Grace, looking after him from the window.

“Oh, Grace! how nice it must be for you to have a mother and a brother!—and a sister, too,” she added, a little doubtfully, for the notion of having a sister like Petronel was not a very comforting one, according to her ideas on the subject.

“Poor little flower, you have a lonely lot, I fear,” said Grace, tenderly.

“I do feel so very much alone in the world sometimes,” said Violet, musingly, “but I must not complain; people are really very kind to me, and the things I dread most do not often turn out as bad as I expect them to be.”

“Poor child! you dreaded coming here very much, I daresay,” said Grace.

“Oh! yes, awfully! you cannot tell how much I hated the idea of being

quartered upon people I did not know, and who would be sure to think me a bore," said Violet.

"Why in the world should you imagine that we should think you a bore?" said Grace. "No, my dear, you must never think we do not care to have you among us." Mamma was talking to me only yesterday, and saying how like you are to your mother, and how well she remembered her; you know they used to be great friends in old days."

"Were they?" said Violet; "oh, how I should like Lady Morton to tell me about her! I don't know half as much as I should like to know about her; you know I was so young when she died, and she had been ill for so long before that."

"Dear child," said Grace, "I will ask mamma to tell you all she knows, I am sure she would like to talk to you about



it, only she was kept back from beginning by the fear that she might unintentionally pain you."

"Nothing could pain me in the mention of my mother, dear Grace," said Violet, caressingly, as she laid her head against her friend's shoulder.

"You will not be likely to hear anything harsh or disagreeable from my mother about her early friend, dear Violet," said Grace; "indeed, I have always heard that your mother was a pure and beautiful angel, and that her death was felt as a personal loss by hundreds of poor people who loved her dearly; and I have heard my mother say that what comforted your poor father most in the first shock of his terrible bereavement was the real heart-felt sympathy of the poor. Friends of all ranks were ready with kind thoughts and

words; but nothing struck him as being such a genuine tribute of love as a sort of wail of anguish that went through the little villages upon his estate, at the loss of the 'dear lady,' as she was always called. From what I have heard of her, she must have been very sweet and charming, quite a mother whose memory any girl might well love to treasure up."

Violet looked up, much moved and at the same time much pleased by Grace's "homage" to her dead mother.

For a moment she could not steady her voice sufficiently to be able to speak; she felt as if a great stone were lifted off her heart. A gush of joy and thankfulness seemed suddenly to brighten her whole existence.

"Thank you, Grace, dear Grace, for telling me that, it is such a relief to me to hear it, for they told me so little.

Papa never could bear to speak of her, and Aunt Katherine says it makes people morbid to speak of the dead, and so you see I knew so little. I always thought of her as a sweet, patient invalid, lying on her low couch in the great south bay-window of her morning room, where the honey-suckles and roses peeped in on purpose to look at her, I used to think. And so all these long years have gone by, and my recollections of her have been very sweet, but very vague. I wanted something real and life-like to give a reality to my memory of her, and now you have told me about the love the poor people had for her, so I shall be able henceforth to picture her to myself, as she must have looked, visiting the poor, and going in and out of their cottages."

"I am glad I mentioned it, then," said

Grace. "I thought you knew what a real sister of mercy she was amongst her humbler neighbours. I remember hearing that when her first child (your baby brother, Violet, whom you never saw) died, she did not sit down idly and repine as so many mothers, naturally enough you would say, do; but she told my mother that the purest and greatest consolation she had in her sore trouble, the most healing balm to her sad and aching heart, was to minister to the sufferings of 'Christ's poor,' as she said. 'What a precious promise it was that we should have them always with us!' she would say."

"Oh, Grace! what a blessed life to lead!" said Violet, eagerly, her large dark eyes dilating, and her cheek flushing with a lovely damask tint in her excitement.

“It was, indeed, a blessed life,” said Grace, “and the great and lasting charm of it was that, with all her fund of activity and energy—qualities too real and too precious to be repressed—she added to them the grace of real humility, and the knowledge that such a work as she was doing, high and holy though it was, was a means, and not an end.”

“But surely that sort of life brings happiness in its train,” said Violet.

“Yes, dear, certainly, when our own happiness is not the object we seek in it. God holds in his own hands the secret springs of gladness, and He will pour them out upon whomsoever He will.”

“I suppose she loved papa very much, besides all the poor people?” said Violet.

“Yes, I believe, shy and clinging as she was, she loved her husband very dearly; I have always heard that they

were a most affectionate and devoted couple," said Grace; "but you must go and get ready now, or you will keep the rest of the party waiting. I have given you something to think about to-day, have I not, dear? I hope your aunt Katherine won't think I am going to make you morbid."

"No fear of that," said Violet, and with a sweet smile and loving kiss, she ran off to dress.

## CHAPTER XII.

“If we had but known, if we had but known,  
 While yet we stood together,  
 How a thoughtless look, a slighting tone,  
 Would sting and jar for ever!”

THE toilette of Lady Katherine Anstruther was generally a somewhat lengthy business, not so much from the care which she bestowed on her appearance, as from the remarkable fact that wherever she went, and whatever she was going to do, she always contrived to mislay the very thing she could not possibly do without. What

agonies of fright and discomfort her hapless maid had to undergo in consequence of this awkward habit, only that long-suffering and much-enduring woman knew. And if she had written her plaint, it might indeed have been a second edition of the "Sorrows of Werther."

Lady Katherine's gloves had wings, her spectacles legs! Indeed, these articles were always running or flying away at the exact moment at which their owner stood most in want of them. But their disappearance was as nothing in comparison with the sort of moral palsy which overtook her when she lost her keys. Thoughtless people look upon keys in a merely superficial manner; they know that there is a certain amount of use and security in keeping things "under lock and key," as they express it; but on the



whole they are inclined to think, if they think at all, that the modern skeletons, the most powerful, and the most irresistible, are skeleton keys, by means of which, no matter how carefully you lock away your goods, any ordinarily astute burglar would be able, if he wished, to get at your most secret possessions.

But Lady Katherine Anstruther was not one of these thoughtless people, nor was she a philosopher (for on this subject extremes meet). To her, her bunch of keys was a real possession, and not only that, but it was a means by which all her other possessions were guarded.

She was a woman of a would-be methodical turn. She was all keys. Not to mention her housekeeping keys, the keys of her dressing-case, of her desk, &c., &c., she had several isolated and outlying keys, belonging apparently

to nothing, and opening no door or lock that the ordinary looker-on could discover, and yet these keys were as precious to her as three times the valuables they secured would have been.

Deprived of her keys Lady Katherine was an abject, miserable wretch, but once in possession of the jingling bunch, she was as placid, as contented a lady as could be met with in the British Isles.

Now this particular morning, when the Craigmorna expedition had been arranged, poor Lady Katherine was keyless, and therefore utterly and entirely miserable.

She was like a lioness bereft of her cubs who was gagged by conventionalism, and so denied the alleviation of a roar.

"I cannot go out until I have found them, Goodwin?" said Lady Katherine to her maid, as she seated herself on the sofa in her room, with a sort of flop, to

show her determination to sit there till the missing keys turned up.

“Is your ladyship quite sure that your ladyship has searched your pockets?” suggested Goodwin for about the tenth time.

“Quite sure, Goodwin, of course I have,” said Lady Katherine querulously—she was always querulous when her keys had gone astray.

Goodwin had nothing else to suggest. She had gone through the same scene very often during the ten years she had resided with Lady Katherine, and ought, by rights, to have become inured to it by long practice; but poor Goodwin was far too sensitive to be lady's maid to a forgetful person like Lady Katherine. She suffered a great deal more than her mistress did on these trying occasions, because, in addition to the fuss and excitement of the hunt, there was the

additional dread lest her mistress should imagine that she had abstracted the keys for some private reasons of her own. Not that Lady Katherine ever really thought anything of the kind for one single moment.

Goodwin was a faithful servant, and her mistress knew her worth well enough. She knew that her maid was really a friend in every sense of the word. She knew that it was the fashion to call servants selfish and mercenary, and to make out that they have all the faults common to humanity, and that in excess of everyone else; but Lady Katherine was superior to these vulgar superstitions, and knew too well the value of a faithful servant to believe in the generalities of domestic terrorism she so constantly heard repeated.

“Shall I call the young ladies, and ask

them to help to remember what you have done with your keys?" suggested Goodwin at last in a timid manner.

So the young ladies were called, and came grumbling.

Marion was too philosophical to look for anything. "If 'twas lost 'twas lost, and there was an end on't," was her theory. And Helen, with more good-nature went through the farce of glancing round the room in search of the missing articles; but she was blundering and stupid, and no new light was thrown on the mystery by her suggestions.

In the midst of the dire confusion Violet passed the open door of her aunt's room, and was immediately called upon to help in the search.

"Why, Aunt Katherine, I saw you put a big bunch of keys in your work-bag, in among the wool for your

knitting," said she. "Shall I run down to the drawing-room and see if they are there?"

No sooner said than done; Violet flew down the oak staircase with a light and airy step, that spoke well for the perfect recovery of her sprained ankle, and, catching the work-bag from under the very eyes of the astonished Mr. Poyns (who was hovering about in hopes of having a *tête-à-tête* with Petronel), carried off her prize in triumph.

There was a light in Violet's dark eyes, a sort of happy softness in her expression, consequent on her conversation with Grace, and on what she had heard about her dead mother, which was very lovely in its way.

Major Armstrong and Sir Archibald Morton were crossing the hall as she ran by them on her way upstairs.

“What a very sweet little creature that is !” said Major Armstrong.

“So my sister Grace says,” said Archie, “and as you two are about the best judges of character here, I have no doubt there is something in her, though she is so shy, it is difficult to get beyond ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ with her in conversation.”

“She has come out wonderfully in the last few days,” said Major Armstrong, “I think that must be your sister’s doing.”

“Grace likes her very much” said Archie, “and I dare say, when she has had a couple of seasons in town, and has lost her shyness, she will be as pleasant as other girls ; they are all alike I think, London ones I mean.”

“The saints forefend !” said Major Armstrong, “that that sweet Violet

should ever become one of those regular London young ladies, who are all alike, as you say."

"How bitter you are against the tribe!" said Archie, rather amused.

"It is just because they are a tribe. Juggernaut's car, that we were talking of this morning, has not more victims than the insane fashion of the present day has. Everything is crushed down to a dead level, and, instead of trying to rise, morally or mentally, girls think it *the thing* to be as noisy, and fast, and frivolous as their neighbours," said Major Armstrong.

"I don't see many signs at present of Lady Violet Ogilvie's becoming either noisy, fast, or frivolous," said Archie, as he moved off carelessly towards the stables to make his arrangements for the drive.



Major Armstrong remained for some time in silent thought.

He was interested in the young girl of whom he had been speaking. He could see at a glance that Lady Violet was too good for the people she was thrown amongst. There was a tinge of sadness about her which made her all the more interesting, but he pleased himself with fancying how that face would light up if real, true lasting happiness came to her. He tried to fancy her bright, gay and sunny, and almost smiled to himself as the fancy grew upon him.

“What an old, maundering idiot I am getting,” he said inwardly, as he caught himself positively glowing with pleasure at the vision which his fancy had conjured up.

It was not that he was falling in love

with her. No, he had done with the tender passion, he should never feel *that* again for any woman; but he saw in Violet a creature, refined and cultivated enough to suit even his fastidious taste, and withal, gentle, simple, and pure, and as yet uncorrupted by contact with the world.

She was much more like his ideal really, than his ideal had ever been, but he did not know that. He believed that the woman who had used him so cruelly had once been as pure and simple-minded as Lady Violet Ogilvie was now. It was a delusion of his, but he clung to it, in spite of all the proofs he had received to the contrary.

There is a certain image which every man sets up in his heart, at one time or other in the course of his life.

The image often falls and is broken,

but the man still believes that it was once what it appeared to be.

He clings to the idea that outward circumstances alone have caused the change, and does not believe that there could have been a flaw in the original material.

So it was with Major Armstrong, and so it is with many another victim of woman's wiles. He blamed the world at large for the fault of one individual !

Yet even in the early days, during which he could have shed his heart's blood to vindicate the truth and honour of his ideal, even in those days she was playing with him, as a cat plays with a mouse ; but, fascinated by her beauty, and lulled into fancied security by the soft touch of *les pattes de velours*, he heeded not his danger.

Even in those days, however, a sudden, sharp speech of hers, a thoughtless allu-

sion to things which his ideal ought to have held in reverence, would startle him.

She little knew how her slighting tone had often hurt him ! she little thought or cared what power her words and deeds had to sting, and to jar and rankle for ever in his breast !

Major Armstrong saw with regret how infatuated Mr. Poyns was becoming about Petronel.

“ She is just another of the dangerous ones,” he thought ; “ her brother talks of their being all alike, but if he only had the sense to look at his own two sisters, he would see what a wide difference there is between them in every way.

“ Ah ! this heavy-heeled nineteenth century has much to answer for, but it has not as yet trodden down this family into dull uniformity, at all events !”

“ What are you looking so solemn

about, Armstrong?" said Captain Burns, emerging at that moment from the billiard-room.

"I was thinking of this hurly-burly, jostling, bustling, ship-wrecking world in which we live," said Major Armstrong.

"Halloa! you are getting cynical! we shall have Diogenes putting an advertisement in the *Times* 'Wanted, a Tub!' soon," said Captain Burns.

"I am afraid by retiring into my tub, I should only shirk the evil, and not remedy it," said Major Armstrong.

"Pooh! my dear fellow," said Captain Burns, "the world is a jolly place enough if you only let it alone; one man can no more stem the stream than Dame Partington with her mop could check the tide of the Atlantic! Depend upon it, 'Live and let live' is the only motto to go by now-a-days. Let us make the best of things,

and enjoy the good, and never mind the evil. We can't annihilate it, so we had better ignore it."

Captain Burns spoke honestly from his own conviction, and I have no doubt his opinions would have been endorsed by many had he spoken to a multitude, instead of to one solitary individual.

But, to the one solitary individual to whom he did speak, they carried no conviction whatsoever, they simply made confusion worse confounded; for they showed him that public opinion was in favour of chaos being left chaotic, rather than that the world should be troubled by attempts to evolve order out of it.

Major Armstrong saw in a moment that, to the mind of such a man as Captain Burns, his own pet theories as to the Divinity of Humanity, and the God-like type which it was a sin and a shame to

allow to crumble in the dust of worldliness, would be at least Greek ; so he was wise enough to hold his peace, and not air his Quixotic ideas on such an unsympathising auditor.

“What time are we to start?” he asked, presently.

“Very soon, I believe,” said Captain Burns ; “at least, I fancy our host has gone to look after his team. Shall we go to the stable-yard and see what he is about?”

## CHAPTER XIII.

“There’s a divinity that shapes our ends  
Rough-hew them as we may.”

SIR Archibald Morton’s mind was sorely exercised when he heard of Andrew Macpherson’s illness.

He pictured to himself the dire distress and confusion there must be in the house, now that the head of the family was so suddenly laid on a bed of sickness.

He longed to send a note to Janet,



even if he could not go himself to see her.

He longed to write to her, to tell her how sincerely he sympathised with her, and how glad he would be to be of use to the family. But happily for Janet, he had the good taste to see that he must be very careful and circumspect in his conduct, if he wished to please her.

Notes and attentions from the laird to a farmer's daughter would not pass unnoticed in that little village, where the doings of the gentry at the house formed the most interesting topics of conversation. To attract attention to Janet by his behaviour regarding her, and then for nothing to come of it, would be simply to compromise her character in the eyes of the village gossips, who would never believe, even

if they were told, that Janet had had the audacity, or the folly, to refuse the Laird.

It was when he got to the stables, after leaving Major Armstrong in the hall, that he was met by the coachman with the intelligence that Farmer Macpherson had had a fit.

Donald Inverarity happened to be coming across the path with a brace of young pointers he had been training, and he paused also on hearing the news.

“I am very sorry indeed!” said the laird, “poor fellow, he was all right yesterday when I was speaking to him.” Then the remembrance of what had happened since the conversation came over Sir Archibald, and putting two and two together with the clearness of one whose senses are quickened by love,

he arrived at the conviction that the scene he had pictured so often, of Janet's confession as to her refusal, must have brought on, or at all events accelerated, the farmer's illness. He tried hard to hide his agitation from the group of men by whom he was surrounded, as he rightly guessed that his visits to the farm had not passed unnoticed.

"Here, my man!" he said, turning to Donald Inverarity. "I shall be much obliged if you will call at the farm on your way home to your dinner, and tell Mrs. Macpherson how sorry I am for what has happened."

"Very good, Sir!" said Donald, raising his hand to his cap with a military salute.

Sir Archibald moved away, little thinking that with his own hands he was

helping Fate to mould his own destiny and that by sending Donald Inverarity, his under-keeper, to the farm, he was more than ever widening the gulf which yawned between him and Janet Macpherson. We are but tools in the hands of Destiny, we know not, and we do not care to know, that we are merely puppets, doing our appointed work on the stage, instead of being the architects of our own happiness, as we fondly imagine it is possible for us to be.

Lady Katherine having found her keys—or rather Lady Violet Ogilvie having found them for her—was now once more in a state of placid content. The party assembled at the door, and after seeing the elders drive off in Colonel Anstruther's carriage (for Lady Morton would not trust herself behind a four-in-hand, even

when her beloved son held the reins) the juniors settled themselves in the break, Violet nestling as near to Grace as she possibly could, and Petronel, looking radiantly lovely, bewitching the heart of her silent lover more than ever.

Major Armstrong sat on the box beside Sir Archibald Morton, and finding him indisposed for conversation, resigned himself, not unwillingly, to his cigar and his meditations.

Mrs. Becket was in her glory, as *chaperon* general to the young people. She was hardly a comfortable neighbour in a carriage, for she was never still for one instant. She fidgeted incessantly. Sometimes the sun was so hot she really must take off her shawl; the next moment the dust was so dreadful that her new dress would be spoilt, so she must trouble some one to find her dust-

cloak for her, which was somewhere in the carriage, she was certain, but she could not quite tell where. This occasioned a general stir and rummage, but no dust-cloak was to be seen, and at last it was found that the owner of the missing article was sitting upon it.

Then her parasol ! Never was there a parasol in this world which had so many points, and everyone of the points seemed to delight in sticking into Mr. Poyns.

But Mr. Poyns had Petronel on his other side, so in his delight at that blissful position, he minded the odious parasol far less than he would have done under other circumstances. A soft rustling breeze blew over the hills as the four horses bowled the carriage along at a merry pace.

Archie, who had been forlorn and dispirited enough when they started,

revived under the influence of the genial weather and a true Englishman's delight in his handsome, thorough-bred horses.

"What a jolly team it is?" said Major Armstrong.

"Yes, they go capitally together," said Archie.

"I suppose your mother prefers two sober old horses, like Colonel Anstruther's, to this fresh young team?" said Major Armstrong, as they passed the barouche, with its respectable pair of elderly grey steeds.

"Yes," said Archie, "my poor mother has rather a horror of horses altogether; she thinks them a dangerous race of animals. I was driving tandem about a month ago, and I wanted to take her with me in the mail phaeton; so Petronel suggested that we should not say a word about the leader, but trust to her being

too near-sighted to see beyond the wheeler's ears."

"She is not so blind as all that, surely," said Major Armstrong.

"Well, I was going to tell you," said Archie, "it's the best joke going. She got up all right, and off we started—the horses were first-rate; I had exercised them well beforehand, and all went favourably for about two miles. Gradually I saw my mother straining her eyes, and fumbling for her eye-glass; but fortunately she had left that at home. At last she said, 'Archie, dear, do you know that there is a loose horse trotting along in front of our carriage; I can't make out what makes it stick so closely to us, and I am so afraid it will make your horse frisky.' So then of course I had to explain how matters were."

"What a shame!" said Major Arm-



strong. "What an undutiful boy you are, Master Archie, no wonder Lady Morton is afraid to trust herself with you."

"It was a shame, certainly," said Archie; "but even now I can't think of the whole scene without laughing."

Major Armstrong laughed too, much tickled by the story, and picturing to himself the alarm which the horse, trotting along in front of the carriage, must have caused Lady Morton for some moments before she found courage to speak of it.

"What are you two so merry about up there?" said Petronel, who never liked to be left out of any joke.

"Don't speak to the man at the helm, Petronel, or we shall all be shipwrecked," said Mrs. Becket, as with a sudden lunge she stuck a point of her parasol

into Mr. Poyns' cheek, within a very short distance of his eye.

"I should think you wished that our chaperon's attentions to you were not quite so *pointed*," said Petronel, with such a sweet smile, and in so low a whisper that Mr. Poyns felt he would willingly have been pierced all over with two-pronged forks, or have become a St. Sebastian to receive such sweet encouragement.

"She has no more heart than the Venus de' Medici," said Major Armstrong to himself, as turning round for a moment, he took in at a single glance the whole situation. "She has no more heart than a statue, and she is trying to land her fish at last after having hooked him so long ago. Well! he is worthy of a better fate, though I suppose he would not thank me for telling him I thought so."

It was a lovely day, and the dashing equipage, with its four spirited horses, attracted a good deal of attention in all the country villages they passed through.

It was hay-making time, and the fields were full of busy workers. The sounds of their voices, the singing of the birds, and the musical rhythm of the mower's scythes, all blended into a sort of pastoral symphony of melodious country sounds.

Grace enjoyed the whole scene immensely, and with her artist eye she was ever discovering fresh beauties in all around.

Infinitely varied, yet infinitely beautiful were the masses of gleaming clouds that chased each other lightly over the hill-tops, changing as they went in form and ever increasing in loveliness.

To Grace "a thing of beauty" was "a joy for ever," and nature's loveliness had

the power of thrilling her with real happiness.

But just at present there was something which prevented her from being as happy as she otherwise would have been—there was an anxious feeling in her heart, which would not be kept down, and care seemed somehow brooding in the distance, even behind the lovely scenes which were unfolding minute after minute before her eyes.

They were entering the border land, and, at each turn in the road new beauties showed themselves, and she was more and more reminded of scenes in poetry and romance in which she had revelled as a child.

In that tall tower behind the hill, had once lived a celebrated outlaw who had made midnight raids on his neighbours' homesteads, and driven off many head

of cattle, while their owners slept, up that steep path-way.

How many thrilling and exciting tales have been told of the border-land, tales that make one shudder with horror as they speak of bloodshed, rapine, and murder, but which at the same time are tinged with a sufficient spice of romance to make them interesting.

Now, as Grace sat quietly in her corner of the break, and watched the smiling happy homesteads, and the meadows where the cattle grazed peacefully, without fear of being driven away in the dark hours of the night; she thought of the difference between these degenerate days and what are called 'the good old times,' and (alas for lovers of antiquity!) she came to the conclusion that the world had not gone down hill so very rapidly after all.

Violet was wonderfully happy that day; not happy in the merry boisterous way that Helen Anstruther or Mrs. Becket were, not self-complacent and self-satisfied as Petronel Morton was; but happy in her own quiet thoughts, and in the new insight she had that day been given of her dear mother's character.

Violet was of a reflective turn of mind, and with very little outward humming or buzzing she laid up a large stock of honey in her mind, over which she could reflect and meditate whenever she wished. There are some people whose thoughts (shall I say *minds*?) are so occupied with little external events, that they have no time or inclination for meditating on the treasures culled in quiet moments, and hoarded up to be pondered over in their hearts.

The drive through the clear air of the hill-side was extremely exhilarating. The scenery was beautiful, and at every turn in the winding road it became more and more picturesque.

At every step were presented admirable subjects for a painter, and on all sides were rocks, heather-clad hills, and desolate ruins, enough to have delighted the heart of many a Royal Academician; but its beauties were little known, for artists are a little like tourists, and tourists are very like sheep who follow one another blindly on a beaten track.

Then, by the wayside there were little shady nooks, so shady, so mossy, so comfortably rural, that it was almost impossible not to cry "halt" to the driver, and to get out to explore.

The birch and rowan trees hung gracefully over the river, and the tall Scotch

firs looked dark and massive in their solemn groups above.

By degrees the valley narrowed, the rocks seemed to approach nearer, as if they wished to catch and crush all travellers who were venturous enough to wish to pass between them.

There was plenty of room, however, for the break, and passing through this defile, the merry party found themselves in a lovely glen, sheltered by hills and shaded by trees.

“This is the place — stand still, my steeds,” said Archie, as he brought his handsome team to an anchor in front of a village-inn.

“Craigmorna is private property,” explained Petronel, “so we must get out here and leave the carriages at the inn, and then walk by the pathway through the woods to the fall.”



They accordingly descended from the break, with many expressions of thanks to Sir Archibald for his capital driving.

As the large party, headed by Petronel, filed off through the path across the wood, Archie whispered to Grace to stay behind the others, and wait for him, as he was going to help the groom and the hostler to put away the horses.

Grace accordingly pulled out her sketch-book, and seating herself on a heap of stones, began taking a pencil-sketch of the gorge through which they had just come.

She was glad of the excuse this gave her, as she was more and more convinced that her brother had something on his mind which he was anxious to tell her about.

What that something was she had not the most remote idea, but she longed to

be able to help him in some way or another, and to chase away the clouds that now hung so often over his face.

## CHAPTER XIV.

“A life of self-renouncing love  
Is a life of liberty.”

“**D**EAR ARCHIE! what is it?” said Grace, when the horses were duly stabled, and the groom had gone down to the cottage with the luncheon-hamper.

Archie seated himself beside his sister, and looked at her for a moment in silence.

He was longing to let her into his entire confidence, and yet the subject was one which he hesitated extremely to broach.

“Come, dear old boy,” said Grace, caressingly, “I am sure there is something amiss with you, and I think I may try to guess what it is; may I not?”

“You may try to guess if you like, Brownie, but you won’t succeed, because you don’t know her.”

“*Her!*” said Grace, bewildered. She had long suspected that Archie must be in love, but she could not make out at all who the mysterious object of his affection could be. He had been heart-whole when he came to Lashiels, she firmly believed, and, unless he had suddenly fallen in love with one of the Miss Anstruthers, she could not make out who the lady could possibly be.

She knew it was not Lady Violet, as in the first place he looked upon her as a child, and, in the second place, he hardly ever spoke to her or looked at her.

“Tell me, Archie, which is it, Helen or Marion? I know it must be one of them,” she said, feeling at the same time amazed that he should care for either of them. “But there is no accounting for tastes in these things,” she moralized.

“Grace! what can you mean? Do you mean to say you believe that I am in love with one of those women, ‘Art’ and ‘Science,’ as they call them. No, indeed. My love is as beautiful as they are ugly, as graceful as they are clumsy, as charming as they are disagreeable.”

“My dear, dear brother! But who is she? and where is she to be found? I am longing to see her, and to tell her how I shall love her for your sake. But I can’t understand, if she is so beautiful and charming as you say, why you should look so sad,” said Grace.

"She is a great deal more beautiful and more charming, Gracie, than I can say; but I may well look sad, for she has refused me."

"Poor Archie!" said Grace, "I am so very sorry for you; I knew that something was wrong, but I could not make out what it could be. But now do tell me who she is and where you met her."

"That is just the point, Brownie, that I am afraid of coming to," said Archie. "I know you will be awfully surprised and horrified, and all that, when you hear that I have been refused by the daughter of one of my own tenant-farmers."

"Archie!" said Grace, too amazed to add more.

"Yes, you will be shocked I am sure, but you must not judge me harshly till I have told you all."

Encouraged by Grace's sympathising look (she could not speak to him), Archie began the story at the beginning, from the day on which he had fallen asleep by the river side, and when on waking he had first seen Janet Macpherson, to the present time. "She is so good, so beautiful, so true, Grace. I know all you would say about unequal marriages and all that, I have gone over and over that subject in all its bearings; but I am more than ever convinced that, except in actual birth and position, she is far, far above me! She is an angel—but there it is no good to think about her, she won't have me and there is an end of it. At least I should be wise if I could believe so, but I cannot help hoping she may yet change her mind."

Grace felt herself to be in a very difficult position. Here was Archie con-

fiding to her his love-affair, and evidently wishing and expecting her to take his view of the case; but at the same time, (not being in love herself) she was sane enough to see what an utter bewilderment and turmoil such an engagement would make in the family should Janet Macpherson change her mind and consent to marry the laird.

Grace was silent for some moments, for in reality she was sorely puzzled, and knew not what to say. At last however Archie himself gave her a loop-hole of escape—a gleam of hope in the dark chaos.

“I can’t help thinking,” he said, “that I was too late in the field; I can’t help fearing that she has given her heart already to some luckier fellow than I am, in which case I know there is no chance for me; for Janet is not a girl to



change. She is so true, and so steadfast! Oh, Grace! if you did but know her!"

Then followed a whole lover's rhapsody, to which Grace listened quietly, but sorrowfully, as she saw how much moved her darling brother was, and what a burning, fiery trial of real affliction this was through which he was now passing.

Nothing is more wonderful, and yet nothing is more natural than the regular swing of Time's pendulum, which goes on rocking itself to and fro, swinging through space and time with a monotony perfectly maddening to the tortured spirit.

The inevitable must be, and it is futile to attempt to struggle with or avert fate. It is inflexible, we cannot influence it.

It was very evident to Grace that Archie was undergoing an awful tempta-

tion to grapple with his fate, to attempt to gain his end, in spite of dangers and difficulties in his present course, and a dim perspective of future troubles in the distance.

“I should think there must be some one else to whom she is attached,” Archie,” said Grace, “that seems to me the most probable solution of the mystery of her having refused you. Girls in her position in general would have jumped at such an offer.”

“Now, Grace, I did not expect *you* to say that,” said Archie, “that is such a common idea—as if Janet would *jump* at an offer!”

And Archie looked so really vexed and out of sorts, that Grace became quite penitent and apologetic in an instant.

“My dear Archie, you know I

did not mean anything disparaging to her!"

"I forgot you did not know her, Brownie," said Archie, mollified in an instant by the look in his favourite sister's eyes. "I forgot you did not know her, and thought you were going to be like the rest of the world, 'eminently practical.'"

"But let us talk this matter over a little more," said Grace, "you know I don't want at all to be 'eminently practical,' as you call it, but I want fully to understand from you what you really mean to do on the subject, and then I shall be the better able to help you."

"Dear Brownie, you have helped me already with your sympathy, I am afraid there is nothing else for you to do," said he.

"Then you really mean to be good and give up all further ideas of pressing the point," said Grace.

"It will be making a virtue of necessity, if you call that being good," he said. "If there was the slightest ghost of a chance of making her change her mind, I would go in for it regularly, and positively besiege her till she consented; but I can read her character too well for that, she means what she says, and what she says is my death-blow."

Grace could hardly help smiling at this tragical finale of her brother's speech, but she valued too much the privilege of his confidence to peril her position of confidante by any such blunder.

She therefore merely said very quietly.

"I have heard, Archie, that 'a woman's nay is but a stepping-stone to a woman's yea.' "

Archie shook his head sadly. "Not with her, Grace, I am afraid, you torture me with the idea, but I am sure it is hopeless."

Grace was really immensely relieved to see that he was fully convinced that Janet's 'nay' had really meant 'nay,' and was not a stepping-stone to her 'yea.' She would have grieved terribly if her darling brother had contracted such an unsuitable marriage, but she was truly thankful that the task of dissuading him from it did not fall to her lot.

It is so easy to see for others which is the wrong and which is the right, and in surveying the maps of our neighbours' lives, the right-hand path branches off so decidedly from the left, that the ordinary observer gives the traveller no credit when he chooses the

right way; but Grace was no ordinary observer: she knew how differently objects and facts look according to the point of view from which they are seen—and she did give Archie infinite credit for his honourable conduct.

She walked along by his side in silence for some moments, then she said: "I am glad we are going away next week, it will be painful for you here now."

"Yes, I long to be off, and yet I feel as if I must stay here always," said Archie. He looked so dejected and sad, that Grace felt that her first duty was to try to rouse him a little.

"We are on a day's pleasuring, remember, Archie," she said, "and you must try to cheer up a little; won't you for my sake? You know it is not

very often that I go to a picnic with you."

Archie in the impulse of the moment stooped down over her and kissed her, he took her two hands in his and squeezed them so fervently that she almost cried out with pain.

But Grace was a brave little woman, and she bore the squeeze without flinching, and rather enjoyed it than otherwise, as it showed her that her brother was really admitting her into his inner confidences.

And so she listened to his rhapsodies, as he poured out in lover-like superlatives the praises of Janet which he could not restrain, even though she had refused him. No being on earth, according to him, could ever be sweeter than Janet Macpherson, more noble, more excellent, more absolutely entitled to that universal

respect and admiration which seemed to be hers by right.

Nature had given to the simple village girl the dignity of high station, and had also endowed her with a far higher gift, a pure and innocent heart, to which worldliness and self-seeking were unknown. Grace thought, as she gazed at her brother, that there must be something peculiar in this young woman of low degree who could refuse such a fine handsome man as her brother was.

"I wonder who her lover is?" she said, "I am sure, from what you say, she must be very much in love with him, Archie!"

"Yes, I am afraid so," said Archie, mournfully.

Archie was certainly as fine a looking young fellow as you could see anywhere.

The sorrow which weighed on his



heart had not yet wrinkled his brow, but it had added to his expression, and it had given him a look of greater strength and purpose than his face had worn in the careless days of his lazy prosperity.

His tall figure, as he walked beside his little sister, was perfect in its symmetry of strength.

His bright golden hair clustered round his forehead, and closely though it was cut, still continued to curl at the back of his head.

There was a thorough-bred air about him, which stamped him at once with the hall-mark of true gentility. But energy without hope is impossible, and it was only the knowledge of Grace's thorough and affectionate sympathy, which prevented the laird from relapsing into apathy.

Grace saw and felt this fully, so she

exerted herself all the more, drawing out the latent thorns which were pricking and festering, and then like a ministering angel, healing the wound with gentle, soothing touch.

By the time they had joined the others, she had soothed him considerably, and his face, though still pale, had lost all traces of agitation.

Grace's heart was very full. She grieved over this trial which had come to her brother—grieved deeply for him—though at the same time she was thankful to Janet for the course she had taken.

She turned away her eyes resolutely from seeing, even in imagination, what the result of such an unsuitable marriage would have been; she could not bear to face the vision of her mother's agony, and of the unhappy division which would have

rent asunder the strong cord of family love which now bound them together.

No — thank God, they were spared that! and a bright upspringing happiness suffused her heart at that thought.

“One more word, Archie,” she said, “before we join the others; our mother need not know this.”

“No; that was just what I wanted to say to you, Brownie,” he replied, “let the subject rest now between our two selves.”

“It will be much better so,” she answered, and he was satisfied.

He had done well and wisely, in confiding his troubles to Grace. She was so sensible and high-minded, as well as so loving and true, that he felt sure she was not only a safe, but a useful confidante.

When Grace was much younger, she

had sometimes been disposed to fret and murmur at her lot, to wonder why it was that she who had such heart-stirrings, such longings to be up and doing, should be condemned to a life of hopeless inactivity.

But that feeling had long ago left her, and as she saw how both her brother and sister always came to her in their troubles, while her mother relied on her for advice and assistance in every matter, whether trivial or important, she felt that she was not leading a useless life after all, though physical weakness prevented her from doing many things which would have delighted her. Her life was to sit still, and by her constant self-renouncing love to win the hearts and affections of all around her.

And need we say that she succeeded? Do we not all know what a comfort it is

to feel sure of at least one person in the world in whom we can confide, and on whose sympathy we can rely?

## CHAPTER XV.

“For that to know,  
Rather consists in opening out a way  
Whence the imprisoned splendour may dart forth,  
Than in effecting entry for a light  
Supposed to be without.”

WHEN Archie and Grace reached the famous Craigmorna Fall, they found the rest of the party all assembled on the grassy bank in front of a pretty cottage ornée, in the largest room of which the owner of the property kindly allowed his friends to picnic.

The barouche had driven up just as Sir Archibald had wandered off through

the woods with his sister, and as the elders had chosen a more direct path to the falls, and had not been detained by any confidential conversation on the way, they had arrived first and were much astonished at not finding the young host there.

“Where *have* you been?” said Petronel.  
“We had begun to feel quite anxious about you—had we not, Mr. Poyns?”

“Oh! ah! yes!” said Mr. Poyns, who had never thought about them at all, and whose whole ideas had been centred in the charms of his enchantress.

Grace's thoughts had been so completely taken up with her brother and the story he had been telling her that she had almost forgotten the water-fall she had come all the way to see. Now, however, as she came suddenly upon

it, the sight was almost overpowering in its beauty.

It was a lovely chasm in the hill-side, through which the water had made its way, and impatient of restraint, had leapt at one bound into the deep pool below, scattering pearly drops of spray on the graceful ferns which grew around, and which stretched forth their delicate necks to catch the welcome moisture.

The contrast between the rush and hurry of the cascade itself, and the deep stillness of the pool a few yards below, was very remarkable.

“It is like life, is it not?” said Grace, turning to Lady Violet, who stood by her, and who she thought was the only person near enough at the moment to hear what she said.

“I was just thinking so myself, Miss Morton,” said Major Armstrong, “it is



like the rush and hurry of life, the way in which we press onwards, heedless of obstacles, and then find the sudden head-long fall—and then oblivion—who cares to remember us after that ?”

“No,” said Grace quickly. “I was thinking rather of the troubles, the trials of life, the rate at which we are sometimes swept onward by circumstances, and then the peace and rest beyond, where, with heaven’s reflection resting on us, we can lie still and wait.”

He was silent after her answer. The course of his life had been a rough one, and his bitter experience had inclined him to take a morbid view of everything, but the simple faith with which Grace spoke, opened a new view for him.

“But is not lying still and waiting stagnation ?” he added, after a few minutes.

“Not if there is a fresh well-spring within,” said Grace.”

“Grace, you are standing so near the edge you make me quite dizzy,” said Lady Morton. And Grace instantly turned away and seated herself beside her mother, ready to answer her questions and to join in the little pleasant chat that was going on, as simply and as naturally as if no deep thoughts had ever been hers.

Major Armstrong remained where he was in silent meditation. He had passed through the whole *curriculum* of spiritual learning which no visible university can teach. He knew by experience that a knowledge of infinite things is not to be acquired by human reason; that it needs development from within our own natures.

But he did not see that the divine

spark was needed to light the lamp within our souls. The light of that lamp is too often quenched by the gross earthly matter which overlies it, but when that is cleared away, then, like a spring of naphtha, it will rise above the clay of our mortality, and burn with a pure flame for ever.

Grace had moved away in obedience to her mother's call, in utter unconsciousness that her words had had the effect of rousing in Major Armstrong's mind such a tumult of thought. She had moved away, and had left him to Nature, doing, without knowing it, the kindest action possible. For Nature is only inanimate to the careless. It is very living and real to those who read it aright, and you may depend upon it there was more spirituality than materialism in that early Greek mythology, which

peopled air, earth, and sea with immortals.

“Ah ! si jeunesse savait ! si vieillesse pouvait !” he muttered to himself as he stood watching the rush of the waters. “If people would only live their lives as realities and not as shams, how much happier they would be !”

Just then, Petronel and the faithful Poyns appeared on the other side of the cliff. She was evidently sending him in search of ferns or heather, or some such perishable gifts (which she would probably throw away the next minute), merely from love of power.

Petronel was always gay, generally charming. She loved no one but herself, and only estimated the affection and admiration which were lavished upon her, by the consideration of how they might be turned to account in her one grand

object of securing a high position in 'Vanity Fair.'

Despise her as he might, Major Armstrong could not help being interested in Petronel.

She was too feminine, too fascinating, too much bent on pleasing and being pleased, to have passed through life as a nonentity, even had she not been so radiantly beautiful. Mr. Poyns was perfectly infatuated, that was very clear, and there was every reason to believe that the young lady had no objection to the prospect of becoming the future Lady Delabole.

"Well, I suppose it's a fair enough exchange as far as it goes," mused Major Armstrong. "He will get the girl he adores, as his wife, and she will get the rank and position she wishes for; but I am a fool to trouble my head about their

affairs, let them manage it their own way, if they are satisfied I am sure I ought to be. It is really no business of mine, only I wish she would not play that hateful game under my nose. I have seen enough of it at the gaming-tables of life already."

At this moment the flag was hoisted in front of the cottage, as a signal that luncheon was ready, and the party assembled, nothing loth, for that repast.

Archie having "had it out with Brownie," as he put it, was certainly better than he had been the evening before, and Grace was delighted to see him taking part in the conversation, with an animation which he had not shown for some time.

It was an evident effort for him, she was sure; but it would do him good. She gave him an affectionate look as he

seated himself next to her at the table, and was happy to be near him, though her conversation was engrossed by Helen Austruther, who, seated at her other side, was giving her a long and voluble account of the drawing she was going to make of the fall—her mind being slightly disturbed, however, by the difficulty which she experienced beforehand, in deciding in what artist's style she should render the subject.

Helen had no idea of originality; she and her sister both worked in grooves, following blindly in other people's footsteps.

She had travelled a good deal, had seen most of the celebrated pictures in the principal foreign galleries and churches, and so thought herself entitled to be considered an authority on art; but she had no love of Nature as

her model, and though she would travel miles to see a celebrated picture of a sunset, she would not trouble herself to cross the room in order to enjoy the finest sky effect in Nature's endless store.

With Grace it was very different. Hers was the true artist's love of the beautiful. She appreciated and enjoyed pictures immensely; but it was Nature she revelled in. When the luncheon was over, she and Helen Anstruther began their sketches, and the rest of the party strolled about the lovely grounds, and followed the winding course of the river through the wooded glen.

"I wish I had a hammer," said Marion Anstruther, as they paused for a few moments at the head of the glen, resting on the rocky seats which Nature had scattered about hospitably for her guests. "I wish I had a hammer," she re-



peated, as no one had seemed inclined to listen to this expression of her wants.

“Bless me! what do you want a hammer for?” said Mrs. Becket, turning round suddenly upon her perch, and staring full in Marion’s face with her bright, robin-redbreast’s black eyes.

Mrs. Becket’s stares were rather alarming, they seemed to pierce through her victim, bones and marrow and all.

“I should like to geologise among these rocks,” said Marion, in a solemn voice, that made the rest laugh.

“For my part,” said Mrs. Becket, “I am quite content with the outside of Nature. I don’t care to knock holes in her poor carcase, to see what her internal economy may be. And what is more, I believe half the people who go poking and prying into stones, and flints, and arrow-heads, and all the rest of it, know

precious little about them, after all."

"What would the *savans* say, Mrs. Becket, to hear you talk such rank heresy?" said Major Armstrong.

"Oh! they are such delicious old muffs, they can't see a joke to save their lives. I once had such a funny adventure in London, I was going to a musical party at Mrs. Auberon's, and, by mistake, the coachman took me to the wrong house; there were plenty of lights, you know, and carriages, and all that sort of thing, so of course it did not strike me that there was anything amiss. I had my niece, Kitty Marsden, with me, and I had been scolding her all the way in the carriage, because she had been reading a novel till the last moment, and had then dressed all in a hurry. 'Kitty,' I said, 'there won't be such an untidy head of hair in the room to-night, I am sure,

as yours ; I have a good mind to take you home and send you to bed.' However, I didn't, for Kitty is a good-natured, merry girl, and comes over one somehow. So up we went, and found ourselves in a large, well-lighted drawing-room ; I was rather amazed at not seeing a creature I knew, but I thought perhaps that I, like a regular country-cousin, had come early, and that all the rest of the set would come presently. But Kitty, who has sharp enough eyes, in spite of her rough hair, instantly twigged that there was no piano in the room.

“ ‘ It can't be the right house, Aunt,' she whispered. ‘ Mrs. Auberon asked us to a musical party, and it is impossible that there can be a musical party without a piano.’ I soon found that she was right, for there was not a creature that I knew, and as for Kitty

having the worst dressed hair in the room! why, I declare there was no one there h 'f as neat! All the men had long shaggy hair, badly made coats, and ugly boots. Most of them had enormous foreheads, and nearly all very ugly mouths."

"How strange that you should have remarked that!" said Major Armstrong. "I have so often noticed that scientific men have ugly mouths."

"My good Sir, it's the long words that do it. How can any mortal man expect to be able to pronounce them perpetually and keep the shape of his lips?"

"Do go on, Mrs. Becket, and tell us how you got out of 'the blues,'" said Captain Burns.

"The blues you may well call them, for they were dismal enough," said she. "One man was holding forth upon some

skulls of ancient Britons which he had been digging up. He was standing next to me, and staring hard at Kitty. When I found I could slip away quietly, I was leaving the room, when he followed me and said, 'Excuse me, Madam, for my apparent rudeness in looking at that young lady, but I could not help being struck with the shape of her frontal bone, and I was thinking what a remarkable skull hers would be.' 'Upon my word, Sir,' I said, 'that is rather a ghastly joke; you seem to be fond of skulls.' 'I have a large collection, Madam,' he replied. 'Several shelves in my study are covered with them, arranged as far as may be chronologically.' 'Bless me!' I cried, 'your room must be a regular scullery.' "

"Mrs. Becket, you did not say that!" said Captain Burns.

“Indeed, I did,” said Mrs. Becket, “but the joke fell flat; the man was so full of his old bones and skulls and things, that he had no brains left for a good laugh.”

“But I don’t understand what all this has to do with geology, and my having forgotten my hammer,” said Marion Anstruther.

“Mrs. Becket means to give you a hint, Miss Anstruther,” said Major Armstrong, “that, however much study of the sciences may develop your frontal bone and improve your appearance in the skull stage, the long words do harm to the shape of the mouth, and, therefore, are better avoided by young ladies.”

“You do not understand me, Major Armstrong,” said Marion impatiently (she wanted to show off, and did not approve of the attention of the public

being centred on Mrs. Becket's lively stories), "you do not understand!"

"I fear you are right, Miss Anstruther," said he, "such themes are not for puny intellects like mine. You know I told you the other night that I agreed with Bernard that there is a limit to the human understanding."

Marion looked provoked. She had a dim idea that the clever, satirical Major was laughing at her; but her wits were not quick enough for that intellectual fencing which is so necessary for those who wish to earn the reputation of brilliant members of society.

Marion's brain was of a very stolid, slow order. By the time she had taken in one subject of which the *flâneurs* of society were talking, they had flitted off to another, and she invariably found herself behind hand in the race.

"You don't really despise science and intellect, and all that sort of thing," said Violet timidly to Major Armstrong, as they continued their walk.

"Despise them, Lady Violet!" said Major Armstrong; "no, indeed, but I despise shams and make-believes. I have no patience with anything unreal, and I am sure you have not either!"

"I can't think where Petronel is, Archie?" said Lady Morton aside to her son.

"Wherever she is, Poyns is too," said Archie; "except the sketchers, they are the only absentees of the whole party."

"What can they be about?" said Lady Morton. "I hope Petronel has not fallen into the river—she is so rash, you know."

"Nonsense, mother; Pet is right



enough, she can take care of herself," said Archie.

"She is not the one most likely to have put her foot into it," whispered Mrs. Becket to Captain Burns.

"It is more than his foot," said he savagely, "it is over head and ears with him."

Lovers who had been slighted always spoke savagely of Petronel, when they found she preferred others to themselves, and Captain Burns was at that moment going through a fit of jealous rage.

But what cared Petronel? She took her own course, in spite of what others thought of her, and her course that afternoon was a very decided one.

Before the party assembled for their homeward drive, Petronel was engaged to be married to Mr. Poyns. What

eloquence he had employed beyond that of which he was so perfect a master—the eloquence of silence—it is not for me to say. Perhaps the rocks and stones had tongues, but we must conclude that somehow the important words were spoken, for these two were now plighted to each other for good or ill, for the rest of their lives.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.







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